VISIT…

PETER SLOTERDIJK

THE ART OF PHILOSOPHY

WISDOM AS A PRACTICE

PHILOSOPHICAL TEMPERAMENTS

INSURRECTIONS: CRITICAL STUDIES IN RELIGION, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

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Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, Creston Davis, Jeffrey W. Robbins, Editors

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PETER SLOTERDIJK

TRANSLATED BY THOMAS DUNLAP / FOREWORD BY CRESTON DAVIS

PHILOSOPHICAL TEMPERAMENTS

FROM PLATO TO FOUCAULT

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FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

"ANALYZING PHILOSOPHY'S TEMPERAMENTAL SYMPTOM"

CRESTON DAVIS

Sloterdijk's Work and Impact

Peter Sloterdijk has the most provocative and daring *temperament* of theorists writing in the world today. With his ever expansive subject matter, Sloterdijk's unblinking bravado and dazzling prose keep pushing thinking beyond the pale of static assumptions and into the creation of new worlds. And that is precisely what makes him dangerous: Sloterdijk believes in creating worlds, atmospheres, and ecologies beyond our assumed "world."

Perhaps the thread that unites Sloterdijk's works over the past quarter of a century is his unique genealogy that transcends binaries and oppositions inherited from both Enlightenment secularism and Christian theology. In this way, he is a thinker *par excellence* of Diogenesian, dyadic, elemental, pluralized thinking that refuses vulgar reductions down into a singular Leibnizian

"monad." This is why Sloterdijk's thinking is as refreshing as it is controversial: where bankers, philosophers, and others see a singular world, Sloterdijk sees worlds (plural). It was, of course, Heidegger that reminded us of a singular world philosophy tethered to the question of Being (existence), a question that Western philosophy forgot. However, Sloterdijk puts a crucial twist on Heidegger's reminder. According to Heidegger we find ourselves "*in-die-Welt-Geworfen-Sein*" (being-thrown-in-the-world), but for Sloterdijk we are rather "*in-den-Weltraum-Geworfen-Sein*" (being-thrown-in-the-*cosmos*). So as Heidegger reminds us to remember the basic question of Being, Sloterdijk reads this watch-sign as a way to rethink the very foundations of philosophy itself by calling into question a singular *a priori* "world." In the place of a singular "world" Sloterdijk gives us a genealogy of pluralized *worlds* or spheres. It is in this precise sense that Sloterdijk's thinking is posed in opposition to Francis Bacon's dictum: "Knowledge is power." Power, for Sloterdijk, is the potential for new creations of new knowledge through connector systems of yet unimaginable and unbounded infinite possibilities. Read in this way we could put a twist on Shakespeare and Charles Dickens: When in Shakespeare's play *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Falstaff says to Pistol, "I will not lend thee a penny," Pistol replies, "Why then the world's mine oyster, Which I with sword will open."[1] And with Dickens, "Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! . . . secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster."[2] The world for Sloterdijk is not a self-contained, solitary, mysterious "oyster"; but rather, worlds pluralize and are uncontainable like a sponge with infinite connectors and thresholds.

What makes Sloterdijk's work so controversial is that for him we have all become like Scrooge, assuming that the material and theoretical world is the only horizon from which existence takes its meaning. But what if there were worlds instead? If there are worlds, as Sloterdijk suggests, then there are different existential

possibilities, that is to say, difference itself becomes the unity into which life draws its breath. This is revolutionary and radically breaks with the history of philosophy (with and against Heidegger) precisely through Sloterdijk's return to the marginalized schools of ancient Greek thought. By decentering a singular world (as the ontological given), Sloterdijk's philosophy becomes nothing short of a Copernican Revolution for the twenty-first-century theory.

Sloterdijk—a Brief Biography

Born just after World War II in Karlsruhe, Germany, Sloterdijk is widely considered to be the foremost public intellectual in Europe. As an undergraduate, he studied philosophy, literature, and history at the University of Munich, and received his doctorate in German literature from the University of Hamburg in 1975. After completing his doctorate he went to India to study under an internationally renowned mystic and spiritual guru, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho). Much of Sloterdijk's work remains indebted to Osho's teachings, which are themselves largely indebted to many religious and theoretical influences, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and psychoanalysis. One of Osho's central pedagogical techniques was the employment of paradox and contradiction as a means by which to help individuals transcend and transform their mental and spiritual capacities. Entering into paradox was a way to move beyond the safe distance to intellectual "critique" and into the fullness of living itself reminiscent of two figures that bookend the Western philosophical tradition: Heraclitus and Nietzsche. Sloterdijk's journey to India gave him the creative power to live with the ambiguity of existence's synthetic, differential unfolding.

Being familiar with the ambivalence and radical contingency of life's flux from Osho and from his own fully independent studies, Sloterdijk began to map out a writing career that changed the very coordinates of philosophical theory. From the germs embedded in his first thesis and best-selling work, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Sloterdijk can be fairly called the first postsecular thinker in the West—a thinker of a life after God and its twin, nihilism.

Sloterdijk's philosophical work can best be identified in three stages: the early period starting in the mid-1980s (with *Critique of Cynical Reason*); the middle period from the late 1990s through 2004 (with the *Spheres* trilogy, *Bubbles*, *Globes*, and *Foam*); and the period from 2005 to the present (which is highlighted by the books *God's Zeal: The Battle of the Three Monotheisms*; *Derrida, an Egyptian*; *Rage and Time*; and this volume, *Philosophical Temperaments*, as well as by Sloterdijk's work as a moderator of the Second German Television program "Philosophical Quartet").

According to Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Critique of Cynical Reason* became a work in philosophy that sold more copies in Germany than any other book since 1945.[3] And there is a good reason for this: Sloterdijk's thesis is as brilliant as it is controversial. To vulgarly reduce his thesis, he basically defines the term *cynicism* in two ways: there is the *Kynismus* and there is the contemporary meaning of "cynicism." The former term is derived from the ancient Greek philosophical tradition founded by Diogenes and represents a countervailing mode of life in both philosophy and action as it sought a unity with nature and disrupted the social and ethical mores. By contrast there is the contemporary cynicism expressed in sarcastic beliefs in the power of reason, which thus never fully takes life seriously. The latter is thus a symptom of the general conditions of a society devoid of meaning (or even the hope of meaning). Thus Sloterdijk critiques contemporary cynicism while drawing on the "kynicos" tradition (the followers of Diogenes) as a way of reuniting philosophy with everyday life.

If *Critique of Cynical Reason* put Sloterdijk on the map, the trilogy *Spheres* secured a permanent place in the philosophical pantheon. The three volumes that compose *Spheres* are vol. 1, *Blasen* (*Bubbles*); vol. 2, *Globen* (*Globes*); and vol. 3, *Schäume* (*Foam*) and were published by the Suhrkamp publishing house in 1998, 1999, and 2004, respectively. Sloterdijk's achievement in the *Spheres* trilogy is truly unparalleled in philosophy today. Again to brutally summarize his work, *Spheres* is a *tour de force* that advances his thesis in *Critique of Cynical Reason* by exposing alternative realities or spheres that are irreducible to a singular, unifying principle. Sloterdijk's poetic prose (form) befits Heraclitus's "Logos fire" (content) in which the world (nay, worlds) alight with elemental and radically contingent primeval forces. So to settle for a postideological, apolitical stance assumes a false move that began with Plato in which this singular world is held in being by a transcendent dematerialized eternal and unchanging ideal. Christianity, according to Sloterdijk, followed suit in Neo-Platonism, creating the conditions of an impoverished life devoted to a masochistic drive obsessed with the afterlife at the cost of never fully living *in this life*.

Philosophical Temperaments: From Plato to Foucault (a Bold Philosophical Hypothesis)

Sloterdijk's book is deceptive because it follows a strict, linear unfolding of seminal philosophical and theological figures from Plato to Foucault through Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and other seminal theorists. In this fashion, this work appears to simply reproduce yet another history of philosophy. But the truth is that nothing is further from the truth. As Sloterdijk himself states, he wishes "to provide a broader readership access to original philosophical thinking." That is why *Philosophical Temperaments* is by far the best book

for accessing Sloterdijk's complex and mature philosophical system (or, better, systems). Yet this book comes with a warning sign: one should not read this book if one is looking to tame and master philosophy and theology (like viewing a captured lion in a zoo from a safe distance). This is because philosophy is not safe. Thus it is not so much that you read and "master" these pages as much as these pages *read you*; that is, in his words: "the discipline of philosophy must present itself, first as a way of thinking, and then as a way of life." So the challenge is for you to *prepare* to be challenged where your tacit assumptions are interrogated; you must wrestle with the text, with yourself, and with your life. For Sloterdijk believes that philosophy is indistinguishable from every part of your life. This is why he is a thinker allied with Pierre Hadot's style, where the mind, the body, and the spirit are unified. If Sloterdijk is a holistic thinker, his methodology is developed through the psychoanalytic traditions from Freud to Lacan.

In this book, Sloterdijk takes his cue from the "father," Freud. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud develops the thesis through a historical analogy to the psychological development of human beings. The stages that Freud identifies unfold first through early trauma (the rupture between parent and child) and defense, then latency, followed by the outbreak of neurosis, and finally the partial return of the repressed. For Freud, Jewish "monotheism" not only was inherited by a marginal Egyptian monotheism, but also was the result of feelings of guilt for killing off the father (Moses); so a God had to be invented to relieve us from this guilt. What Freud saw in religious inventions of monotheism, Sloterdijk sees in the philosophical tradition. Like a child, philosophy is born out of shamanism, from which humans acquire a newly found consciousness, but Platonic and Greek "orthodox" philosophy becomes always already indebted to the "symbolic order" of larger, more powerful worlds and nascent empires. This forces a tension between the "real" shamanism and the "symbolic" and

philosophical new global reach. Ancient Greek philosophy thus became caught between the two spheres of ancient tribal cults and emerging new empires as it attempted to come to terms with finding peace in a chaotic world using argument and logic as its beacon of truth.

But there is a catch: this "peace" is defined, in the first place, through the emergence of an expanding empire and its concomitant cosmopolitan consciousness. In other words, philosophy becomes something like a "fast-food" pill that one takes in order to be able to accept a newly formed version of "peace" articulated through an externalization of violence as constituted in the Hellenistic empire. This is borne out in how Alexander the Great expanded the Greek Empire with Aristotle at the intellectual helm. Thus, the brilliance of Sloterdijk's book reveals how shamanistic beliefs were raw and underdeveloped, taking on the characteristics of Lacan's articulation of the "Real" (that which resists symbolization and what Freud called "early trauma"). But it is not as if Sloterdijk interprets Platonism and Greek philosophy as the measure against which the "Symbolic order" takes its meaning *vís-à-vís* the "Real" (shamanism). Rather, it is the "Symbolic order" that erects the threshold through which the mysteries of adult life are accessed and practiced, whereas ancient philosophy severs its relationship to tradition and the tribe in order to reformulate a new, distinctly urban outlook. The upshot of the argument here allows one to fully come to terms with Sloterdijk's radical reading: philosophy becomes the handmaiden to a cosmopolitan consciousness founded on recollecting the archetypes of eternal essences beyond our material existence. But what he is suggesting is that shamanism too has its own "sphere" of meaning that is much more holistic and possesses its own horizons of what it means to live well.

Following the psychoanalytical reading, we can see that the knife of philosophical (Platonic) rupture necessarily creates a

dark world into which reason illuminates the way via a denuded version of truth predicated on argumentation and logic. But, as Sloterdijk adroitly points out, Platonic (and Christian) philosophy sets itself up for its own failure, creating a neurotic impulse to get to the bottom of reality via reason, but the very *telos* itself is always already unobtainable. Consequently philosophy is forever stained with its own ineptitude, caught by the necessity for analytic clarity but unable to fully eradicate existential contingency. One can easily recognize this seductive "promise" which was originally given by Prometheus's theft in the paradoxical form of fire's illumination. This "philosophical symptom" is encapsulated as the original theft that gives life—the *felix culpa* in Christian terms.

Philosophy, as Sloterdijk understands, is a process of coming to terms with its original "theft"—knowledge is stolen from the gods, and yet it illuminates, queerly. The quest, therefore, that Sloterdijk's entire work follows takes place in the "hole-gap" located between necessity and contingency—between the "Real" and the "Symbolic" orders—between the unknown that we already know (but are too afraid to know that we know) and the unknown that we will never obtain but forever desire. In her novel *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, Marguerite Duras identifies this "hole-gap" that appears in the worlds of desire, which is articulated by the narrator via the main character, Lol Stein:

> What would have happened? Lol does not probe very deeply into the unknown into which this moment opens. . . . She has not the faintest notion of the unknown. But what she does believe is that she must enter it, that that was what she had to do. . . . [And by entering into the gap of the unknown it would give to Lol] "both their greatest pain and their greatest joy, so commingled as to be undefinable, a single entity but unnamable for lack of a word. I like to believe—since I love her [the narrator says]—that if Lol is silent in her daily

> life it is because, for a split second, she believed that this word might exist. Since it does not, she remains silent. It would have been an absence-word, a hold-word, whose center would have been hollowed out into a hold, the kind of hold in which all other words would have been buried.[4]

And here we have a great example of the absent void of the Real (i.e., the "hole-gap") that haunts, betrays, and at the same time reinforces the Symbolic Order. Sloterdijk reads the history of philosophy (and even its very nature) through the reality of this void and thereby redefines the very terms of philosophy itself. Philosophy is not about finding out the "facts" of our fundamental reality (i.e., science), but rather is a process that, deploying a "Nietzschean" reversal, reveals "facts" which become less and less significant. At the end of the day, philosophy for Sloterdijk becomes an interpretation opened up for rivaling interpretations not determined by a singular "transcendent" cause (a theology, a sovereignty, or Platonism), but rather about new possible worlds and creative "truths" and their constitutive values invented and reinvented by us. Welcome to philosophy's temperamental behavior.

PREFACE

In the mid-1990s, the Diederichs publishing house and I conceived a plan that seemed audacious at the time: an alternative history of philosophy spanning the great periods of ancient and recent European thought in the form of readers on important thinkers. At the time, this idea was surely driven in part by the desire to offer an anticyclical, intellectual signal in opposition to the rampant mindlessness so characteristic of the German *fin-de-siècle*.

The project's novelty was the decision to let these groundbreaking thinkers speak in their own words. Our desire, as editors and conduits of philosophical primary texts, was to undermine the hegemony of secondary literature, which has long been responsible for the fact that the original ideas are everywhere disappearing behind impenetrable veils of commentaries and commentaries on commentaries. By turning to the texts themselves, we wished

to provide a broader readership access to original philosophical thinking, and, not least, to put into the hands of students of the academic discipline of "Philosophy" an alternative to the "Introductions" that dominate the field. I was convinced—and still am—that there can be no introduction in philosophy. Rather, from the very first, the discipline of philosophy must present itself, first as a way of thinking, and then as a way of life.

Thanks to the good collaboration between the publisher and the editor, the project quickly took on concrete shape and was able to persuade a number of excellent scholars to take on the task of selecting and introducing the primary texts. The result, within a few short years, was a series that constitutes nothing less than a philosophical library *in nuce*. These books soon found a way to readers and reached a broad audience, especially through paperback reprints. Only two of the planned volumes (not least ones that were especially dear to my heart), those on Heidegger and Adorno, were not completed because of legal difficulties. It was a troubling experience to witness the owners of the estates of Heidegger and Adorno using their monopolies to prevent publication of selections from their *oeuvre* under the aegis of leading experts.

Combining the editor's prefaces from the various volumes into the present book created an effect that was originally not intended and yet creates a certain plausibility now: to my own surprise, I noted that the vignettes of thinkers assembled here add up to something like a meaningful whole—not a history of philosophy, but still a gallery of character studies and intellectual portraits that show just how right Nietzsche was when he noted that all philosophical systems have always been, unbeknown to their authors, also memoirs and confessions. That the selection of authors entailed an unavoidable element of unfairness cannot be denied. By avoiding randomness, it hewed to a middle path between necessity and arbitrary personal taste.

The title of the present book is an unmistakable allusion to Fichte's well-known dictum that the philosophy one chooses depends on the kind of person one is. What he intended to say is this: submissive souls opt for a naturalistic system that justifies their servility, while individuals with a proud disposition reach for a system of freedom. This observation is as true today as it has always been. My hope is that the brief studies that follow show that the range of philosophical temperaments goes far beyond the two contrasting types of timid and proud individuals. It is as expansive as the soul illuminated by the logos, of which Heraclitus said: "You would not find the boundaries of soul, even by traveling along every path, so deep a measure does it have."[1]

PHILOSOPHICAL TEMPERAMENTS

PLATO

In the famous 344th Aphorism of his *Gay Science*, entitled "In what way we, too, are still pious," the anti-Platonist Friedrich Nietzsche erected a monument—as honorific as it is problematic—to the founder of the Athenian academy: "But you will have gathered what I am getting at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests—that even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take *our* fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year-old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth; that truth is divine. . . . But what if this were to become more and more difficult to believe?"[1] One might imagine the history of European philosophy as a relay race in which a torch lit by Plato—and a few of his predecessors, chiefly Parmenides and Heraclitus—was passed down from one generation to the next.

The image of an intellectual torch relay across the millennia is open to sharply contrasting views of what it means: whether one wants to see this race simply as the history of truth, as nothing more than the history of a problem, or even, as Nietzsche suggests, the history of our longest error.[2] Marsilio Ficino, the key figure in fifteenth-century Florentine Neo-Platonism, had good reason to refer to Plato as the "*philosophorum pater*" in the introduction to his commentary on the *Symposion* (*De amore*).[3]

In its major current of idealism, European philosophy was in fact the outgrowth of what one might call a Platonic patristics; it unfolded as a complex of tenets and authoritative pronouncements that seemed to flow ultimately from a single generative source. The Platonic masterworks have functioned as a kind of seed bank of ideas from which countless later minds could be fertilized, often across great temporal and cultural distances. That is true not only of the Athenian Academy itself, which, as an archetype of the European "school," was able to maintain its teaching for nearly a millennium in uninterrupted succession (387 BCE to 529 CE); Plato's writings also proved a marvel of translatability and radiated into foreign languages and cultures in an almost evangelical way—the most significant examples of which are the reception by Rome and the Arab world,[4] and later also by the German-speaking lands. These are surpassed in importance only by the fusion of Platonism into the Christian doctrine of God (theology). What Adolf von Harnack once called the Hellenization or secularization of Christian theology, in both its acute Gnostic as well as gradual catholic manifestation, occurred largely under the banner of the divine Plato.[5] Moreover, some of the speculative theosophies of Islam have transmitted a wealth of Platonizing motives down to the present day.

The *Corpus Platonicum* is thus more than just a collection of classical writings: it is the foundational document of the entire genre of European idealistic philosophy as a way of writing, a doctrine,

and a way of life. It represents a new alliance between intellectuals and the inhabitants of the city and the realm; it launches the Good News that this dismal world can be penetrated by logic. As the gospel positing that all things are grounded in something good, Platonism anchors the striving for truth in a pious rationalism—and it took nothing less than the civilizational revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to tear out this anchor. Stages in that uprooting were Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the blind world-will, Nietzsche's perspectivism and fictionalism, the materialist evolutionism of the natural and social sciences, and most recently chaos theory. In its classic pedagogical form, Plato's teaching sought to convey instructions for a blessed life in theory; it was in the truest sense of the word a religion of thinking, which believed in its capacity to unite investigation and edification under one roof. Some historians of religion maintain that Plato's teachings represent in many respects a kind of modernization of shamanistic traditions. Since time immemorial, those traditions have known of the soul's journey to the heavens and the salutary intercourse with the spirits of the next world. From this perspective, Plato's realm above the heavens in which pure ideas floated among themselves would be merely a heaven rendered logical, and the ascent of thinking to the level of the ideas merely a modernized journey of the soul traveling in the vehicle of the concept.[6]

With its noble optimism about the knowability of the world and its ethic of the conscious life, Platonism was in a sense the superego of European rationalism which was becoming a world-moving force. Even if Plato's high-minded search for the good life in a good polity seemed from the outset to suffer from the defect that it was merely a utopia, it did set the measure and direction for the highest aspirations of the philosophical desire: friendship with the truth saw itself as being concerned about peace for the *polis* and the world, and committed to its continuous re-creation from the spirit of self-understanding. In its intention, Nietzsche's

saying about the philosopher as the physician of culture is certainly true already of Plato. It was inevitable that these pretensions were dismissed as overzealous—indeed, some have wanted to detect in them the foreshadowing of what would come to be called the totalitarian temptation in the twentieth century.

For all that, Plato's discovery of a connection—however problematic—between personal wisdom and public order remains valid. And even if philosophy sank back into a profound depoliticization in late antiquity (essentially already from the time of Alexander the Great), it retained—like a kind of first psychotherapy—an undeniable jurisdiction over questions of inner peace; inner peace might seem like the preliminary step toward outer peace—a superior, quiet beacon in a tumultuous world. The Platonic tradition was in agreement with the Stoic and later the Epicurean teachings in defining the philosopher as the expert for investigating the peace of the soul.

If we have reason to this day to remember the beginnings of philosophy among the Greeks, it is chiefly because it was philosophy through which the indirect world power of the "school," which still rules us and leads us astray, began to impose itself on the emerging urban societies. What steps onto the stage with the philosopher is a demanding kind of educator, who desires that the urban youth no longer grow up within the confines of conventions, but seeks to shape them in accordance with superior and artificial criteria that are universal in their form.

The tandem of Socrates and Plato marks the breakthrough of the new educational idea: they speak out against the conventionalism and opportunism of the teachers of rhetoric and the sophists with a plea for a comprehensive reshaping of the human being. *Paideia*, or education as the forming of the human being for a latent or manifest imperial "big world," not only is a foundational word of ancient philosophizing, but also identifies the program of philosophy as a political practice. It reveals that the birth

of philosophy was conditioned by the emergence of a new, risky, and power-charged world system—today we call it that of urban cultures and empires. This system compelled a retraining of the human being in the direction of being fit for the city and the empire. To that extent one may claim that classical philosophy was a logical and ethical rite of initiation for an elite of young men—in rare cases also for women. Under the guidance of an advanced master, they were to reach the point of transcending their prior, merely familial and tribal conditioning in favor of a far-seeing and broad-minded urban and imperial humanity. Thus, philosophy is at its very outset invariably an initiation into the big, the bigger, the biggest; it presents itself as a school of the universal synthesis; it teaches how to think of the multifarious and the prodigious as a single, good unity; it introduces the individual to a life under rising intellectual and moral demands; it bets on the possibility of responding to the growing complexity of the world and the heightened majesty of God with a continuous effort at expanding the soul;[7] it invites us to move into the mightiest new edifice: the house of Being; it wants to turn its students into residents of a logical acropolis; and it awakens in them the urge to be at home everywhere. As the goal of this exercise, Greek tradition offers us the term *sophrosyne* (prudence, self-control), Latin tradition the term *humanitas*. To the extent that the philosophical school of antiquity is thus *paideia*, an introduction into adult prudence that constitutes humanity, it carries out a kind of rite of transition to cultivate the "large-spirited" human who is suitable for the city and the empire.[8] It would be unconsidered to see in the values of *paideia* and *humanitas* merely nonpolitical ideals of personal character. That the wise man recognizes *all* humans as kin—is this doctrine really only a humanitarian naiveté, born of an exaggerated expansion of the ethic of the family?[9] If one recalls the pinnacle of Europe's culture of higher secondary schools between 1789 and 1945, it becomes clear that all European nation-states pursued a

humanistic education system to prepare their youth to take on tasks within the framework of their national-imperial programs. As much as philosophy and education were already in antiquity oriented toward the individual, the emphasis in all the "work on oneself" was initially and mostly on preparing the individual to be a "human being within a state." Only when the split between power and spirit had become very deep, as during the Roman Empire, did philosophy fall under the sway of the model of the autonomous wise man who has turned his back on the powers of this world.

Classical philosophy held out to its disciples the prospect that they could achieve serenity in a chaotic cosmos; the wise man is he who recognizes chaos as the mask of the cosmos. He whose gaze penetrates into the deeper structures gains the freedom of overall mobility; no locus within Being is entirely foreign to him any longer; that is why the love of wisdom is the high school of exile. By designating—in a way as witty as it was programmatic—the wise man as a *kosmopolítés*, as a citizen of the world, philosophy promised superiority over a universe that was, already in its very form, a vicious marketplace of gods, customs, and opinions—and simultaneously a battlefield on which multiple polities fought for hegemony. Too little attention has probably been paid to the fact that Plato's youth—he was likely born in 427 BCE—coincided entirely with the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE). The philosopher's ominous distance from empirical reality and the idealistic tendency—often faulted—to withdraw from the merely given are easier to understand if one bears in mind that in his younger years, Plato rarely experienced a world that was not distorted by the passions of war.

In modern parlance one would therefore describe classical philosophy as a discipline of orientation. If it wanted to promote itself, it could do so above all with the promise to transcend the confusion of existing conditions through an orderly return to secure foundations—in modern terminology one would speak of

a reduction of complexity. The philosopher as the eliminator of malicious multiplicity bore traits of the leader of a mystery, who guided students into the realm of the first principles, from where one could acquire gratifying, sweeping overviews. But every ascent into higher stations demands its price. If the philosopher wished to recommend himself as the educator of the never-before-seen type of human being guided by reason, he had to arrogate to himself the right to establish new yardsticks for what it means to become an adult in the city and the empire. And in fact, the meaning of what it meant to become an adult changed radically in the transition from tribal societies to political and imperial structures.

Anyone who wanted to become an adult in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE had to prepare himself to take on power on a scale that was historically all but unknown—or at the least make the burdens of power his own. As teachers of what it meant to become an adult, the philosophic educators thus became midwives at the risky birth of human beings transposed into larger, more powerful worlds. Preventing these births from resulting in monstrosities required an art that balanced the new plenitude of power with a new prudence and circumspection.

From the time of the oldest tribal cultures, symbolic births at the threshold to adulthood have been a matter for ritual initiations. The modern *paideia* invariably has followed in the footsteps of that tradition; in this area it stands as the successor to—and also the enemy of—shamanism, where the latter not only refers to an archaic healing art, but simultaneously encompasses the authority to initiate the younger generation into the mysteries of adult life. In the cosmopolitan *polis*, however, it had become impossible to perform initiatory tasks only with shamanic techniques; the democratic, combative city no longer favored the trance. After Socrates and Plato, it was not possible to regard as grown up only the person of whom the ancestors and gods of the tribe had taken possession. Urban forms of life demanded a new

type of adult, one to whom the gods did not get too close—this means at the same time they stimulate a type of intelligence that shifts from tradition and repetition to study and "memory." Revelation and evidence are no longer created through ecstasies, but through reasoned conclusions: truth itself has learned to write; entrained sentences lead one to it. That is why the meaning of memory is radically altered in Plato's body of teachings: according to Plato, what we should have remembered at all costs we lost as we plunged into this world; what we learn by heart here is confused or useless. Henceforth, "remembrance" of a prenatal, *a priori*, or pure knowledge is to render the mythological and rhapsodic memory culture superfluous: thus begins the revolution of knowledge through the *a priori*.

With some liberty one could compare the Platonic procedures with a psychoanalysis in which we recall, not repressed primordial scenes, but clouded archetypes and obscured mathematical essences. Whether such remembrances can achieve full transparency may remain questionable. In any case, to Plato, thinking under human conditions means no longer sharing the full lucidity of the heavens. Mortals, as long as they are present in these bodies, pay their dues to the difference of all differences: because they know most things only vaguely, they suffer the rupture between the transparency up there and the clouded view down here. We are condemned to having to deal with an addition of darkness in all things. Philosophy is at the least an endeavor to illuminate the twilight we inhabit.

It was logical that the philosophical discourse began to push back the traditional myths and opinions; in place of fairy tale–infatuated stupor and rhapsodic enthusiasm, it aspired to a state of "critical" soberness, which has ever since been considered the working climate of authentic philosophizing. To be sure, with its doctrine of beautiful manias and *sobria ebriatas* (sober drunkenness), Platonism still entered into a compromise between criticism

and enthusiasm, even if such concessions were foreign to the later, dry schools. To the extent that it was enlightenment, philosophy could do nothing other than disenchant the old-religious constitutions of the soul and the crude stories of the gods; but to the degree to which it swore its disciples to an absolute, highest good, it simultaneously set in motion a reenchantment through the living universality. Only where this higher enchantment failed—for example, under the impression that argumentation created more problems than it solved—did skepticism and the unproductive spinning of the analytical wheels arise. When that happened, continuous reflection could also become a symptom of schizoid alienations: for instead of illuminations from the True-Good-Beautiful, those alienations see everywhere only depressive grays. In fact, late classical philosophy already furnished the arguments for a self-weariness. In this regard, the academicism of the ancients is kin to its contemporary counterpart.

In the optimistic early years, philosophical reeducation intended no less than to change the soul and enthusiasm of individuals; its goal was to turn confused children of the city into adult cosmopolitans, inner barbarians into civilized inhabitants of the empire, intoxicated opinion-holders into thoughtful lovers of knowledge, doleful slaves to the passions into cheerful individuals in control of themselves. At the beginning of European pedagogy there was a time when the word *school* always meant school of refinement. The modern term *education* hardly reflects any of this ambition of philosophy's original project; but even our contemporary notion of philosophy, where it refers to the activities of sullen faculty and the endless discourse of a subculture of jealous mental athletes, barely recalls the solemn seriousness of the Platonic enterprise—to begin, on the basis of a school, with a redefinition of what it means to be human. We must give credit to intellectual historians like Paul Rabbow and Pierre Hadot for protesting against the modern intellectualistic and cognitivist

misunderstanding of ancient philosophy, and for reminding us instead of its tenacious self-educational pathos.[10] Philosophy that would not have operated as a transformative exercise (*askesis*) would have remained suspect to its ancient acolytes also as a source of knowledge. When Diogenes of Sinope succeeded in having Alexander step aside so that he would not block the sun, the goal of the exercise was also achieved. In this sense the wise pantomimes of kynicism are the equal of loquacious Platonism. To the man from Sinope belongs half of everything that the expression "unwritten teachings" can refer to.

Without question, philosophy after Socrates and Plato was in pursuit of disenchantment. With that, the new schools opposed the unreflective habits of the state of being half-awake. Deliberateness is still the most modern and most improbable condition, since the old collective ecstasies have not yet relinquished their ancient power. Indeed, behind the Athenian philosophers stood not only their archaic colleagues, the shamans and iatromancers, the seer-healers of ancient Greece, but also the Homeric rhapsodes and the poet-theologians of the Dionysian cult. Breaking with them was the historical mission of philosophy. After Socrates, all philosophers were *nouveaux philosophes*; they had to be new to the extent that they were involved in the media revolution of written culture and urban rhetoric. As such, they act as agents of an epochal transformation in the ancient relationships of knowledge. They respond to the fact that henceforth every thinker had to become a writer of his knowledge. The discourses about Being, god, the soul—ontology, theology, psychology—enter into the lines of continuous prose texts and thus always present themselves also as ontography, theography, and psychography. The lines of the philosophical text are discrete ways to the truth; they are antiquity's data highways to absolute information. Soon, however, there would be too many lines; the "paths" become alarmingly elongated, so much so that doubts arise as to whether the lovers

of wisdom can still attain real knowledge in their lifetime; is it not possible that these strange arguers ended up possessing only libraries and not enlightenment?

Be that as it may, because the philosopher as author led the way on this long and steep path, a new mode of authority was born: that of authorship, which rests on the psychagogic power of the written word. Plato's infamous polemic against the poets does not attest to an amusical aversion to pretty words; rather, it expresses an unavoidable media competition between the new, soberly composed discourse about god, the soul, and the world, and the old, trance-inducing rhapsody and the intoxicating and convulsive theater-theology. Plato presented himself as a medium—as it were—of the god of the philosophers, who was proclaiming through him the commandment: I am an image-less god, you shall no longer have any sung and versified gods beside me. Henceforth it was no longer the tone and the verse that created the true music, but the prose argument and the dialectical thought process. Thus the Platonic opus not only marks the epochal threshold between orality and literacy, but also stands at the boundary between the older, musical-rhapsodic transmission of knowledge and the now prosaic-communicative procurement of knowledge.

What accounts for the charm of the Platonic texts is that they, unlike the Aristotelian treatises and the entire academic literature, still reveal the closeness to the manner of speech of the wise singers and the pious dramaturges. For more than two millennia the tone of philosophy has remained fixed to that of the thesis-formulating prose tractate—until modern times, when, after a few preludes in Renaissance philosophy (Bruno, in particular), another rapprochement between the poetic and the discursive prose takes place in authors such as Novalis, Nietzsche, Valéry, and Sartre. Viewed as a whole, the massif of classical philosophy between Plato and Husserl is one of the most stupendous consequences of literacy. Therein lies one of the reasons why precisely

today—at the dawn of another media revolution—rereading our philosophical tradition promises to become a fruitful enterprise.

In terms of its self-conception, the modern world is carrying out a comprehensive anti-Platonic experiment. This appears to have become possible only because the grounding of knowledge and action in the "ancient European" idea of a supreme Good could be abandoned. The dominant technological pragmatism of the modern era was given free rein only after the metaphysical inhibitions standing in the way of unlimited moral and physical experimentation had been removed, or at least enfeebled. From this perspective it becomes understandable why modernity is dominated by a postmetaphysical disinhibition. Within that disinhibition, liberation and destabilization are ambivalently interwoven. The consequences of the uncoupling from the metaphysical foundation—deconstructivists would say: from the foundation-illusion—are twofold: the empowerment to engage in unrestrained projecting is paid for by the discovery of an internal abyss. The fact that a deep-seated discomfort with modernity exists today among so many contemporaries has to do undoubtedly with the ambivalent experience of a steady increase in power and an unstoppable erosion of security. When ambivalence prevails, positive balance sheets are difficult to come by. A growing number of people are doubtful—with ever more compelling justifications—that the world experiment of the modern age still amounts to a global sweepstakes: too obvious by now is the rising tide of risks and losses. If one wanted to name the principle that rules the ecology of the modern mind, one would have to lay bare why modernization brings with it ineluctably progress in the awareness of being adrift. Were it possible to make this sufficiently clear to all the actors and audiences of the modern game, it would also become evident to them why this tendency cannot be reversed through a flight to the ancient foundations. The fundamentalism that arises today around the world out of

the mistrust of modernity can never offer more than makeshift constructs for the helpless; it produces only semblances of security without deeper knowledge; in the long term, it destroys the infected societies with the drug of false certainty. A good antidote to the fundamentalist temptation is to open once again the book of European philosophical knowledge and retrace the lines and paths of ancient thinking—to the extent that the brevity of life allows us to venture upon such elaborate recapitulations.

The motto "think again" presupposes the summons to read in a new way. All fruitful rereading benefits from the refractions and shifts in perspectives that are inherent in our retrospective view of traditions, provided we are conscious contemporaries of the ongoing upheavals in the conditions of knowledge and communication within the emerging telematic global civilization. There are many indications that the current generations will pass through a rupture in the shape of the world which—in profundity and momentousness—is at least as important as the one that gave rise to classical philosophy twenty-five hundred years ago. A study of that ancient rupture could therefore inspire an understanding of the present one.

We will not gain better knowledge today without participating in the adventures that await us in the revision of our own history. A new aggregate state of intelligence will extract new information also from the old schools of philosophical knowledge: this can mean that one is ready and willing, with Plato and in spite of Plato,[11] to work on actualizing our intelligence.

ARISTOTLE

In the fourth century BCE, the genius of the European conception of knowledge revealed itself for the first time in its monumental completeness. Astonishing for the wealth of his interests, the scope of his writings, and the perspicuity of his conceptual distinctions, Aristotle stands like a portal figure of near-mythic force at the entrance to the high European schools of knowledge. Considering what he accomplished in his lifetime as a thinker and writer, the idea suggests itself that what would come to be called the university from the Middle Ages on was anticipated in the figure of a single man. The mind of Aristotle was the senate—as it were—of a university with a wealth of departments. In him, the natural sciences and humanities—if one may use such anachronistic language—merged in the breadth of their range, already presided over by the philosophical doctrine of the first things, also called theology. In a few disciplines—logic, for example—

Aristotle was both pioneer and completer in one. It comes as no surprise that the history of the European university during its first, medieval half (lasting four hundred years) was simultaneously the history of Latinized Aristotle studies. If a scholastic theologian during this time wished to invoke the authority of the great Greek, he could do so safely with the phrase *ut ait philosophus*: "as the philosopher states." Never has a thinker been honored as Aristotle was with this formula. When early modern thought broke out of the lead chamber of scholastic authoritarianism, it was once more the name "Aristotle"—this time with a negative accentuation—that marked this development. The cry: "Aristotle errs here!" could have become the watchword for a risk-embracing independence in the reexamination of fields of knowledge that had become excessively scholastic and convoluted.

A look at Aristotle's life work reveals that the "theoretical life"—the often-invoked *bíos theoretikós*—of the ancient lover of wisdom must not be misunderstood in the sense of a modern conception of leisure. What the Romans later used to call the *vita contemplativa* was often nothing other than the *vita activa* of philosophical investigations. The theory itself was grounded in asceticism, in unflagging practice, in the daily exertion of the logical and moral powers. Philosophers are athletes of conceptual categories. To be sure, intellectual asceticism is not without is own pleasures; when Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, put forth the proposition that all humans by nature strive for knowledge, he was generalizing into an anthropological thesis what was for him a permanent, personal experience: in its unceasing movement, the active intellect takes pleasure in itself. A small likeness to the divine becomes evident in this knowledge-narcissism. Even in its driest enumerations and most industrious distinctions, the Aristotelian intellectual edifice still attests an original connection between knowledge and joy.

Occasionally the question has been raised whether Aristotle is not compromised as an educator and teacher of wisdom because

he failed to prevent Alexander, the so-called Great. What resonates in this question is also the conviction that philosophy attains its goal only when it has transformed every will to power and all manic ambition. That would amount to judging the scholar with the yardstick of the wise man. Wisdom in the effusive or esoteric sense was not Aristotle's thing. For him, the word *sober-mindedness* described the humanly possible. From Aristotle one could certainly learn how to appropriately carry out logical and empirical investigations, but not how to die in confused passions in order to be reborn in enlightened self-control. Aristotle was not able to turn his brilliant, wild pupil into the philosopher-king Plato had called for; after years of interacting with the greatest thinker of his time, there remained alive in Alexander the belief that there was something bigger than philosophy. For Aristotle, in turn, there were more important things than putting a philosophical bridle on a prince's son hungry for greatness. Alexander's Egyptian and Indian adventures may have kindled the straw fire of Macedonian imperialism; what was on the agenda for him, the logician and scientist, were Alexandrian campaigns of curiosity, which were to go much further than all politics great and small. Across industrious decades, Aristotle created an empire of knowledge, whose subsequent history—if one desired to recount it in detail—would become nothing less than the epic of European sciences right up to the threshold of the modern period.

The Aristotelian empire in books, once their author was no longer alive, had to fragment—like Alexander's successor kingdoms—into individual disciplines. More so than virtually any thinker before him, Aristotle was aware that the edifice of knowledge could be consolidated only as a joint undertaking by many generations, and that the investigative intelligence must prove and optimize itself over time. Later scholars could learn from him what pose they should strike in the sequence of generations of the sciences: one of self-conscious gratitude toward one's predecessors,

or one of discrete pride—if personal, new accomplishments justified it—toward posterity. Thus, Aristotle is a man of the middle also with respect to the tradition of knowledge. As both a natural scientist and an ethicist he glorified the wonder of Being in what is constant and normal.

AUGUSTINE

Augustine stands before posterity as the only intellectual personality of the early Christian era who is spiritually and psychologically illuminated down to the minutest detail—in fact, he may be the most clearly visible personality of antiquity, the only individual of world history before the Renaissance of whom we have close-ups, so to speak. This precarious privilege of transparent visibility does not mean that Augustine, clearly still bound entirely to ancient notions of the world and humanity, anticipated certain tendencies of modern individualism or aspects of modern portrait culture. And he is definitely not an existentialist *ante litteram*. That Augustine exposed himself to his contemporaries and posterity so radically through his work, not least by virtue of his epochal *Confessiones*, which made him the patriarch of a literature of self-revelation, is the result of a theological process that the bishop of Hippo waged—victoriously—against himself.

We possess such a movingly concrete, human, and intellectually profound picture of Augustine largely because he himself gathered the evidence of his conduct and his sinful propensities as evidence against himself and tried to cast them into the cleansing fire of the confession. Augustine became and has remained visible because he took himself seriously as the exemplar of a human being who, with God's help, ended up taking God more seriously than himself.

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty, so ancient and yet so new, late have I loved you." This habit of self-revelation shows how far Augustine—although he remained committed to the Platonic parameters as a philosophizing theologian—had moved away from the Hellenistic motives of philosophizing about origins. For while philosophical Hellenism was largely characterized by the elevation of the knowing soul to the lofty objects of its contemplation, what prevails in the Augustinian discourse of God and humankind is a continuously radicalizing ambivalence. When Augustine endows the human interior with the highest accolades as the vessel of the traces of God, he simultaneously yields to an irresistible urge to debase humankind beneath a transcendental majesty. In this regard, Augustine's work does not merely mark the Latin phase in the gradual Hellenization of Christianity, in which scholars believe they can discern the principle of the early history of Christian doctrine. The phenomenon of Augustine has become fateful in the history of ideas and mentalities because through him, the most stirring idea of the ancient world, Plato's construct of love as a homesickness for the preexistential Good that is intuited, was subjected to a momentous, darker reinterpretation, indeed, a reversal. For the Platonists, the descent of the soul into the body leads to an obfuscation of memory, from which the incarnated soul recovers to the extent to which it conforms to its calling: to purify and perfect within itself the memory of the Good. The soul of the darker Augustinianism, by contrast,

is stained by an incurable corruption. That is why its labor of remembering the ultimate Good ends in the despairing realization that, by its own effort, it will never be able to return to the unspoiled participation in the light of the Good.

This Augustinian turn—of which it is impossible to decide whether it has the character of a discovery (that is, insight) or invention (that is, projection)—leads to the Christian catastrophe of philosophy. It inaugurates a more or less manifestly melancholic millennium in which human reason will be unable to recover from the trauma of its one-sided dissociation from the Best. But it is only under the banner of what is on the human side an irreparable separation that the motif of a love unilaterally aggregated in God can become all-powerful. Where mutuality is lost and the kindness of humanity has dissolved into nothing, that is where the realm of grace begins. Philosophy may well contemplate the gift, but the kingdom of theology establishes itself through the new guiding concept of grace. The doctrine of grace serves to provide doctrinal pastoral care for the state of human forlornness under God. Augustine opened the sluice gates through which elemental masochistic energies have been pouring into European thinking ever since; with a radicalism that virtually raised him to the rank of a higher power, he elevated incurable human nature to the primary motif of his interpretation of reality. Thereafter, not even love as such can heal, unless it is divine love, restored and granted by Christ. But even as such, it remains overshadowed by an agonizing particularity: for now the love of God no longer has the character of an affection that is universal and allows for unconditional participation, but has that of a strongly selective, patronizing pardon.

In the end, where the human being who loves merely in a human way, that is, the egotist who must always have himself and his desires in mind, steps onto the stage, the later Augustine sees always the stigma of loss and the trace of an original guilt that

reaches deeper than any possibility of redemption and anything humans could achieve. One might say that Augustine in this way uncouples philosophy from its classical, manic constitution and places it under the auspices of depression. For him, too, the human being as such is already a futile passion, but the reason behind this futility is not, as in modern existentialisms, the absurd structure of the *conditio humana*. The Augustinian person leads a lost and wasted life because the stain of original sin essentially excludes him from the feeling of security within God, and because he must bear the uncertainty of salvation in the extreme. For Augustine, what is unredeemable in humanity is forever combined with the uncertain in the impenetrability of God. To be sure, for a small handful there continues to exist the fullness of salvation and free access to the glory of the source. But the nature-given participation of the human soul in the splendor of the absolute Good is no longer sufficient to offer an adequate reason for its self-rescue and its secure return to the Best. Within the Augustinian realm, even the most pious retain a reason to doubt their salvation to the very end.

The intellectual optimism of the Hellenes is bound to fail in the face of these insights into God's selectivity. Under Augustine's melancholy mediation, God's self-sufficiency grows into a fortress that is impregnable to humans, and into which only those are accepted who, by virtue of an impenetrable act of God's will, have remained from the outset among those who are not doomed. Augustine's masochistic fundamental operation springs from the identification with a God against whom the human soul is always in the wrong, and whom it would have to unconditionally acknowledge as being in the right even if it is among the damned.

Just as Pascal would one day wager on the existence of God in the face of the uncertainty of revelation, Augustine, in the face of the uncertainty of being a chosen one, wagered on unconditional resignation. His psychological genius lies in the fact that

he ferrets out within the person the self-asserting "I" unwilling to resign itself, in all its new guises and defensive positions. And precisely this observation that the human being never yields fully and without ulterior thoughts inspired Augustine to conduct this model trial against his youthful vanities, and also against the illusions of his middle years, with which he had tried to save his neck within Christian philosophism. As God's prosecutor, the formidable bishop leads the prosecution against himself and all other comrades-in-fate in the all-too-human self-centeredness. He exposes himself, the defendant accused of original sin and original rebellion, in all the hiding places of his unresigned self-will. In the process he draws out into the light that it is not only truth that dwells within the human being, but also the reason for despair, narcissistic wickedness, ungodly corruption, and the trace of Satanic separatism.

What Augustine accomplished here was no less than the fundamental inquisition against human self-love, which would become a constant in the history of Western mentality: we find it still in Fichte's verdict against the finite "I" enthralled with itself, in Schelling's analysis of selfishly misused human freedom, in Dostoevsky's definition of man as "a being that goes on two legs and is ungrateful," in Sigmund Freud's later theorems of human autoeroticism, in Jacques Derrida's critique of the word that hears itself talking, and in the neoconservative lamentations about mass individualism—all are part of the history of the antinarcissistic inquisition launched by Augustine and the Catholic Fathers. The axiom of the trial against the separated, self-absorbed human being is that he who wishes to be pleasing to God must be displeased with himself. The truth about the truth is that it should be dreadful to those affected.

Modernity has discovered that humanity can be displeased with itself even without God. Truth and depression unfold together in a correlation that is conceivable also without God's immense

sadism and without God's immense grace. It is Augustine's contributions to the interpretation of the human separation from the good foundation and his keen deconstruction of human self-protections that secure the Christian classic author an inexhaustible post-Christian readership.

BRUNO

Among the glittering series of Renaissance philosophers who began to lead early modern European thought out of the hegemony of all-powerful Christian scholasticism, the charred silhouette of Giordano Bruno stands out impressively. Ever since his death at the stake in Rome in February of 1600, his name—shrouded by rumors of pantheistic nefariousness and cosmological daring—has been a fixture in the annals of martyrdom of the modern free spirit. The vagaries of his posthumous fate have retained something of the erratic luster and misfortune of his life story. They create the impression that his followers and interpreters spent more time poking around in his ashes than reading his writings.

In fact, intellectual history knows few authors whose afterlife has been so heavily shaped by projections and monopolizations on the part of enraptured sympathizers for their own interests.

And so the history of the reception of Bruno is, with few exceptions, that of a well-intentioned legasthenia; many a descendant in need of someone to lean on has put into Bruno's mouth what he would have said had he been the person people liked to imagine he was. Thus, ally-seekers of every stripe have hitched him to their cause, with anticlericalists and pantheists leading the way; in recent years, even a certain Catholic pietism has tried to lay hold of him. People are eager to make it seem like they were burned at the stake by his side in order to benefit from his aura as a victim. This kind of obtrusiveness may be a typical mechanism for the history of dissident philosophers. To the extent that it is based on a lack of better understanding, it is largely due to the fact that Latin has been a dead language among Europe's educated elite since the nineteenth century, as a result of which Bruno's critical texts, written in Latin, were long buried as though in a tomb. Anyone who wants to expose himself to the power and greatness of Bruno's thinking in its most impressive manifestations must first endeavor to liberate the "magician" Bruno, the memory artist, the materiosoph, the image-ontologist, and the teacher of nimble transformation from his Latin crypt so as to ponder his ideas in the light of modern languages.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Elisabeth Samsonov, who—inspired not least by the work of the grand old dame of Renaissance scholarship Frances A. Yates—has begun to provide German readers access to some of Bruno's long-forgotten Latin writings. His work attests to a misunderstood aspect of the myth of the modern era: it illustrates the birth of modernity out of the spirit of a philosophy of imagination. In the wake of the rediscovery of Bruno's doctrine of the world-constituting achievements of "imagination," the lazy penchant of intellectual historians to construct modern thought entirely on the basis of Descartes becomes more dubious than ever. One must go back to the universe of Bruno, Shakespeare, and Bacon to find the keys to largely

unknown treasuries of incipient modernity. Like hardly a thinker before him, Bruno immersed himself into the cosmo-dynamic of memories. With his insights into the nature and function of *memoria*, Giordano Bruno can become the contemporary of those who today huddle around the brain as if it were the locus of the riddle of the universe. Because he emphasized the *ars*-character of remembrance and memory, Bruno is the first "art" philosopher of the modern era.

It is high time to blow off the dust from Bruno's manuscripts to reveal what alone honors a thinker who was a master of Italian and Latin prose: the luminous literalness of his real thoughts.

DESCARTES

Few periods in the history of thought have become as alien to contemporaries as the seventeenth century, which is usually presented by the history books as the founding era of modern philosophy. It is, in fact, hardly possible for those born and thinking later to project themselves into a time when figures like Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Thomas Hobbes were still New Philosophers. Blinded by the historical import of the impulses that have come to be associated with these luminaries, we are barely still able to return with an unbiased eye to the epoch when what posterity liked to call the project of modernity was hardly more than a lively exchange of letters between a few dozen correspondents.

The optical illusions of history make what was initially merely a sophisticated premonition of the inner link between power and method seem like the departure into the age when technology

seized power. The peculiarities of this seventeenth century also include the semimythical quality of its eminent authors: their attempts were credited as laying down foundations, and their programs as epochal turning points. It was not long before the conservative enemies of modernity eagerly adopted this mythological mode, with the result that Descartes's name could become a symbol for an immoderately self-confident humanity's frivolous deviation from the divinely ordained order of things. It is not surprising that the restoration of the nineteenth century wanted to count Descartes—whose works had been on the Catholic Church's Index of Prohibited Books—among the distant progenitors of the French Revolution, as though it were only two or three steps from the foundation of thinking in the principle of *cogito* to the dissolution of all things. Descartes's world, of course, is not that of the bourgeois revolution, but that of the wars of religion. The pathos with which he pursues the distinction between certainties and probabilities in his fundamental works was also fed by the object-lesson that the religious civil war provided to contemporaries. For what else was the Thirty Years' War between the confessional parties (which overlapped with virtually all of Descartes's adult life) than the battle between mere probabilities that had leapt from the theological seminaries onto the battlefield?

Descartes countered this bearing of arms by the fanatics of probability with his avowal of absolute evidence and the secure and peaceful process of his method. Where method and evidence had won the upper hand, the philosopher suggested, armed religious fanaticism and the presumptuous assertion of positions would have to make way, and what was left after the end of the war of inexactitudes could—ideally—be nothing other than the peaceful advance of all truth-loving minds along the secure paths of regulated and connecting reason. Descartes's grand idea was to move thinking into a realm devoid of strife.

In the history of thought there is probably no other author in whom the word *method* was charged with so many promises as in the case with Descartes. We clearly hear pacifist resonances in the overtones of the new idea of precision: this idea stands for self-confidence and solidarity, generosity and entrepreneurial spirit all in one. In his conception of method, Descartes publicly announced his renunciation of the dogmatic ballast of the Aristotelian universities. In an elegant and antiauthoritarian manner, Cartesian reflection rebuffed the claims of tradition and its professors: he who has the power to begin anew need no longer engage in dialogues with the dead; he who turns a new page is for now exempt from the dialogue with history. With this mindset, the new philosopher no longer took a fancy to the argumentative contests of a powerless and self-referential Sorbonne culture, which had long since lost the connection to the arts, the workshops, and the counting houses. With the word *method*, Descartes threw open the windows on the present, and it turned out that this was a time when an invigorated human ability demanded to be placed on a new logical and moral foundation. It was as though Descartes, in so doing, had created, alongside the old nobility of blood and sword and the younger *noblesse de robe*, a separate nobility of method, which recruited its members from all strata, provided they were willing to swear an oath to clarity and lucidity. From the outset there was no doubt about the antifeudal character of this group of individuals with new skills. Even if the philosophizing nobleman Descartes never gave reason to doubt his dual awareness of nobility, the inherited and the self-created, subsequent generations of bourgeois intelligentsia did recognize in him their natural ally. The Cartesian nobility of competence gave rise to the class of minds who thought for themselves and without bias, a class that has formed the critical ferment of the European intelligentsia from the early modern period on. Still today, and not entirely without reason, the myth of the

rationalistic national character of the French invokes the Cartesian privileges of lucidity.

Within the history of theory, the phenomenon of Descartes describes a radical currency reform of reason. In an era of a galloping discourse inflation—triggered by unrestrained allegorical mechanisms and excrescences of theological word games—Descartes created a new criterion for what constituted meaningful speech, built upon the gold standard of evidence. The necessary conciseness of this criterion arises from the stipulation that from true propositions must always follow, on the one hand, good dispositions and, on the other, useful machines. As the author of the *Discours de la méthode* would declare: "Being of no use to anybody means the same as being worthless."

If Descartes's name remained controversial through the ages, it was largely because he symbolized, more so than almost anyone else, the victory of the engineers over the theologians. He paved the way for a thinking that opened itself unconditionally to the task of the epoch: the building of machines. As a result, the non-machine-building forms of intelligence rightly feel devalued or repudiated by the Cartesian impulse. As the creator of the analytical mythos, Descartes simultaneously created the "metaphysics"—as it were—of machine-building, in that he began to break down all of existence into the simple, smallest parts, and sought to make known the rules that govern their composition. By committing thought entirely to the back and forth of analysis and synthesis, he made reason itself conform to engineering and stripped it of its ancient, contemplative muse. Thoughts now become internalized forms of work, and the life of the mind itself is put on the path toward the production of useful things. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to believe that Descartes's fundamental mechanistic conviction had to lead invariably to a break with theological tradition. Precisely in the methodologically new beginning of scientific thought, providing a foundation proves to be the real metaphysical

activity. But since in the great philosophical rationalism only God can furnish the foundation of foundations, modern philosophy of the Cartesian type remains characteristically suspended between theology and machine theory. There is good reason why the great systems-architects of German Idealism celebrated Descartes as their precursor. For them, as for the great Frenchman, laying the foundation was the piety of thought. But the fact that consciousness had now been brought into the function of laying the foundation constituted the modernity of the transcendental approach. Only the dissolution of the foundation in the philosophy of consciousness in the twentieth century turned the Cartesian universe completely into a historical artifact. Descartes's work remains relevant as a testimony to the very interlacing of science and contemplation that today, more so than ever before, imparts to philosophical thought its precarious dignity.

PASCAL

To anyone who was trained through authors like Goethe and Nietzsche to think in terms of elective affinities and elective enmities across epochs, the Pascalian renaissance of the twentieth century presents itself as one of the most appropriate receptions in modern intellectual history. It is but a single step from the obvious to the necessary, and it was inevitable that the thinkers of Christian and non-Christian existentialism during the first half of the twentieth century sensed a kindred soul in Pascal. Did his own discomforts not anticipate those of our time? Was his melancholy not already that of a later modernity weary of Enlightenment? Was his discourse about humans not already congenial with the self-experience of a civilization that, in the twentieth century, struck fear and terror into the heart of humanity like never before: fear of itself and of the degeneration of its lofty projects?

When Pascal, in a memorable turn of phrase, called the human being a "thinking reed," who would not have understood this as an emblem for our newly experienced fragility? And when he spoke of humanity as a deposed king, who would not have thought about the large sociopolitical projects of our age, and of the end to the demiurgic excesses? The character masks of our time include the dethroned history-maker and the unmasked *phyturgos* (creator of nature)—two figures who seem to have stepped right out of Pascal's anthropological *Pensées*. However, one cannot attribute Pascal's remarkable accessibility—at least in some portions of his work—to the fact that his protoexistentialist tones facilitated the projective appropriations by those who later saw themselves as kindred spirits.

Pascal attracts the attention also of radical revisionist interests, whose intent is to deconstructively rethink the entire context of the Platonic-Christian history of ideas on the basis of fundamental positions that are vitalistic or subject-critical. Nietzsche demonstrated how this relationship of elective enmity does not spare the luminaries of the ancient world: with a power of instantiation bordering on violence, the arch-deconstructionist Nietzsche challenged the founders of the moralized metaphysical view of the world—Socrates, Paul, and Augustine—to a duel on a battlefield that transcends the epochs. In this clash of the titans, Pascal is called upon as a fellow combatant, because Nietzsche perceives him as the highest reembodiment of the Augustinian genius on modern soil. Like his great predecessor, Pascal embodies a type of intelligence that is proud enough to be open to humiliations. It is only from a certain height of aspirations that the mind becomes vulnerable to the experience of failing itself. Inspired by Augustinian insights into human brokenness, Pascal began with a remapping of the scope of human greatness and human wretchedness. In the process, not only did he uncover—in an original revelation—the correlation of knowledge and interest, which has

remained alive down to contemporary discursive constellations, but he also exposed in classic fashion the dialectic between the rise in capabilities and the escalating experience of powerlessness. In this regard he has become, deeper and more discrete than Descartes, the ancestor of modernity. But while Descartes tends to address his readers in a matutinal temper and in programmatic departures, Pascal is an author for nocturnal reading and an accomplice of our intimately fractured afterthoughts.

Nietzsche's protracted aversion to the melancholy Christian mathematician is a testament—as eloquent as it is fair-minded (within limits)—to the author's strengths. In Pascal, Nietzsche discovered what is to be most valued in an intellectual person: the sense of intellectual honesty that is also capable of turning against one's own interest: *fiat veritas, pereat mundus*. Yet he simultaneously notices in him what he recognizes as the biggest danger: the penchant for miserabilism and for letting oneself sink into an affirmative infirmity. If the non-Christian were to be instructed by the paradoxical Christian, it is chiefly where the latter pronounces his final verdict on the human condition: did Pascal not in fact anticipate Nietzsche's theorem of the will to power with his talk of the *désir de dominer* in his Provincial Letter No. 14?

But when it comes to recapturing for the humanity of the future the possibility of a metaphysically unpoisoned self-love, Pascal is no ally, but an instructive and estimable opponent. He remains an indispensable ally for all those who wish to have self-understanding precede self-love. Pascal embodies the fundamental conflict of the modern world with an almost archaic intensity: the contradiction between the operative and the meditative mind. Were the modern scientific system capable of having something like a conscience, Pascal would have to be its guilty conscience, for his work attests to how the incisive and the profound mind could be conjoined. Together with Thomas Hobbes, Jean Baptiste Racine, and John Milton, Pascal stands as a dark, doubt-riven portal figure

at the entryway to the modern world. The shadows of his pensiveness had time to fall upon future generations. His paradoxes have imprinted their marks upon French literature down to the present: when Sartre still insisted on disliking himself in order to tear himself away from his own lethargic existence, or when Michel Leiris embraced the happiness of pronouncing his unhappiness, these statements and attitudes move within a sphere that Pascal's generous dialectic helped to create. If the intellectual history of the last centuries were an account of the conjunctures of the absurd, Pascal's place within it would be forever secure. He is the first among the philosophical secretaries of modern despair.

LEIBNIZ

Since the early nineteenth century, the public perception of philosophy in Germany has been shaped above all by two functional roles or character masks: that of the university teacher and that of the freelance writer. With German Idealism, a cluster of professors had occupied the heavens of grand theory; now, civil-servant idealists in the late-feudal state enshrined the precarious unity of throne and philosophy. In figures with the stature of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, the type of the professor of philosophy attained the preeminent position within the *res publica* of the learned; Schelling's gnosticizing princedom of theory provided a model for later prophesying from the lectern. In sharp contrast to this, in terms of both typology and the ecology of ideas, philosophical writers, especially during the post-1848/1849 period and the era of Wilhelm II, created new strategies for literary and political communication with their public

via contemporary marketplaces of ideas. As freelance writers, Schopenhauer, Stirner, Marx, and Nietzsche played the essential part in surpassing the professors through the philosophy of the writers.

If one looks back at the phenomenon of Leibniz through the lens of this typology, his figure appears strangely remote and distorted. Seen against the backdrop of the philosophical *imagines* and investigative images of the twentieth century, the genius of Leibniz falls into a typological gap in which he becomes all but invisible—and if contemporary thought has not known how to reestablish a convincingly fruitful relationship with the work of the philosopher and scientist, the main reason is that it no longer understands the kind of type Leibniz was.

To understand the *oeuvre* and theoretical temperament of this great scholar and comprehend them on his own terms, it is imperative to reconstruct the typological locus or the field in which Leibniz pushed himself up to such monumental and polymorphous height. The Leibnizean field of theory sees the merger of two shaping forces that cannot be adequately grasped from either the professorial or the literary form of philosophical thought. The first matrix of the Leibnizean *Wissenskunst* (knowledge-art) is the magical universal science of the Renaissance along with its subsequent developments during the Baroque. Leibnizean universalism, which a romanticizing history of philosophy erroneously turned into a matter of genius, represented in truth the outflow of an epistemological-magical ideal that had asserted itself from the fifteenth century on in numerous potent incarnations. The phenomenon of Leibniz stands in typological succession to the Renaissance magus and the Baroque universal scholar. Among his predecessors, who molded the polyvalent scientific enthusiasm of the early modern period, are such luminous names as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Girolamo Cardano, Giordano Bruno, and Athanasius Kircher; Leonardo da Vinci also belongs to this

kinship system of individuals who did everything, attempted everything, endeavored everything.

It was the task of the early modern development of science and knowledge to guide these "Faustian" impulses—whose wild forms ended up, typical of the modern age, in charlatanism—onto institutional pathways. It is no coincidence that one of the principal concerns of Leibniz as an organizer of science was to direct the progress of knowledge onto suprapersonal tracks by setting up academies. Where there had been magic, there were now to be polytechnics. Although the civilizing of universalism by placing it on an academic footing eventually necessitated a division into subjects and specialization, in Leibniz himself the power of the older, magical encyclopedism continued to operate, discretely but unbroken. It speaks to his success in providing impulses for the modern organization of science that soon after his death, posterity was barely able to comprehend him as a temperament and a type. As the last, most brilliant, and most cool-minded of the Faustian doctors, he paved the way for the triumph of a non-Faustian science.

But the typological riddle that is Leibniz goes beyond the mention of his eminent place within the expiring history of philosophical-scientific encyclopedism; it does more than point to the state of philosophical thinking before the sciences became differentiated into separate entities. Leibniz is difficult to grasp with modern concepts of philosophy also because the better part of his intellectual activities unfolded within premodern or half-modern contexts. Not without ulterior motive, the portraits of Leibniz in the official histories of philosophy show the thinker wearing an elaborate courtly wig. This detail of his physical habits illustrates quite reliably his place within the theoretical scene of his day. Leibniz is, indeed, the court-intellectual par excellence—and this not only in an occasional and opportunistic function, as was the case, for example, with Descartes, who made himself available for

several months as a conversation partner to Queen Christine of Sweden, or Voltaire, who corresponded with Frederick of Prussia and Catherine the Great. What became concentrated in Leibniz was a now largely forgotten phase in the intellectual history of Europe. His intellectual role was entirely that of the argumentative diplomat, the courtier-theorist, the cameralist and princely advisor, the respondent and correspondent. It would be difficult to make sense of what were for Leibniz characteristic intellectual exercises if one fails to recall the courtly alliances—however problematic—of power and intellect that formed the basis of his pragmatic work. Leibniz is the prince of the consultants to princes, the supreme exemplar of a forgotten secretarial art, which spun peculiar, theory-saturated relationships between the rulers of territorial states and their learned doctors. It is only within this context that one can understand the traits in the profile of Leibniz's activities that will not fit into any later cliché about philosophers: Leibniz the project-designer and discreet idea-prompter to small-state diplomacy, the litigant and traveler on behalf of princely business, the author of memoranda and appeals in tangled legal-political affairs, the legitimist and historiographer of matters relating to the House of Hanover.

Only the convergence of the courtly intellectual and multitasker with the Baroque universal scholar could bring about the specific Leibniz effect—that marvel of intellectual polyathleticism in which the happily restless, proficiency-addicted, multifocused intellect of the thinker radiated in all directions. Like a Sun King of thought, Leibniz exhausted himself in countless departments of reason. If the concept of courtly philosophy ever made sense, it did so in his case. There is good reason why the notion of perspective played a sustaining role in the work of this philosopher-diplomat. Leibniz's cheerfulness represents a world in which the Cabinet Wars of reason could still be constrained by an unshakeable confidence in harmony. In their disciplined

optimism, his metaphysical treatises betray an author who sees himself as charged with the diplomatic representation of Being. In his theodicy, Leibniz not only defends the perfection of God's world against objections raised about it by human discontent; with the brilliant formalism of his arguments, he also attests to the excellence of a state of affairs in which God can have the best of all possible lawyers defend the perfection of his world. Competent activity all around: according to Leibniz, that is the surest way—within human limitations—to imitate God, the one who interconnects all in everyday life.

By defining human subjectivity as competent and informed activity that is endlessly perfectible, he made his contribution to the formation of the modern subject as the entrepreneur of Being in its totality. The brightness and dispassionate friendliness of the Leibnizian world is grounded in the circumstance that its subject is allowed to move, still without any scruples, as the agent of a rational deity within a universe rich in perspectives and full of mysteries worthy of investigation. In post-Leibnizian worlds, the relationship of loyalty between Subject and Being seems destroyed, and with the rise of existentialisms, life philosophies, and systems theories, the optimistic fit between subjective and objective reason was lost. Ever since, the subjects have found themselves entangled in total wars of various types of reason; as agents, they are at the behest of uncomprehended majesties. For the future history of humankind it will be important to regenerate a principle of optimism (or at least a principle of nonpessimism) with post-Leibnizian means. If that were to happen, who would rule out the possibility that future generations will find their most important inspiration in Leibniz?

KANT

Immanuel Kant's critical work launches the parallel action between the French Revolution and German philosophy that contemporaries already had taken note of as an epochal constellation. Indeed, in both movements—as in their shared preconditions, namely the industrial and monetary revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—there took place the breakthrough to the bourgeois age, which ever since has deserved to be called the modern world. The philosophy of Kant is bourgeois in several respects: it is civil, because it lays claim to the emancipation of philosophical thought from the tutelage of theology and of positive and revealed religion. Kant clung to this position with existential consistency: when the faculty and student body at the University of Königsberg walked, festively arrayed, from the assembly hall to the church on the *dies academicus* in order to profess, on this occasion, the unity of the academic

and the religious community, Kant would pointedly step out of the line and set out for his home by circumventing the church. In this instance, a bourgeois identity meant taking the civil side in the alternative between monastic and civil philosophy posited by Vico. How seriously Kant took this matter is evident, not least, from the fact that he struggled, turning his back on traditional forms of monastic and ecstatic transcendences, to come up with a bourgeois transcendence. He believed he had found its core in that free moral action by the individual which, motivated neither by success nor hope, does the right thing simply out of respect for the moral law—and out of respect for oneself as the subject distinguished from everything else that exists as the subject of that freedom.

Kant's thinking is bourgeois for another reason: it articulates itself at the boundary between the academic community and the general public, and it appeals even in its technically most difficult parts (at least potentially) to the critically won consensus that is supposed to emerge out of the discourse on public matters by those who understand. When Kant steps forward as a writer, he does so in the sincerely naive expectation that the archetypal assembly of bourgeois society around the profane book will repeat itself also in the reception of his writings. Here, the bourgeois way of being takes on the meaning of learned republicanism. Kant's historical moment is thus not only the birth of bourgeois society in the political sense; his work simultaneously falls within the golden age of the Gutenberg era: it shares in its genius by documenting how the self-reading of the Reformation evolved into the self-thinking of idealistic classicism.

There is a third way, still, in which Kant's thought is shaped by a fundamental bourgeoisness: Kant conceives of the place of the human being in the world neither as cosmopolitanism in the sense of the ancient wisdom teachings, nor as creatureliness under God in the sense of medieval theology: the Kantian person is

fundamentally a fellow member of the species and in this respect a citizen of the world. Of course, the Kantian world-*polis*, unlike the ancient *polis*, is not the result of a transfer of the urban idea of order to the universe; rather, it springs from the application of the notion of freedom and self-assertion to the totality of beings capable of reason, that is, the human race in the kind of universal or global scope that Europeans were compelled to conceptualize after the age of discovery and colonization. That is why Kant's world citizenry is transmuted into the continuation of Christian holiness by means of civil and international law. It demands from each individual not only that he become a useful member of his national community, but also—and above all—that he prove himself as a functionary of the species with the capacity for reason; finding the future form of the political life of this species is something that those willing to embrace reason conceive of as an infinite task. The Kantian world citizens are saints in frock coats, and like their predecessors in the Roman arenas, they, too, are to commit their lives to realizing the empire of reason in the circus of the modern state. It is no coincidence that logical socialists and logical theocrats were also found among the Neo-Kantians—the "would-be saints" of the modern world. They are athletes of the reasonable coexistence with all other members of the species. The *pax Kantiana* encompasses the world community of the reasonable as in some kind of minimalist church. It is the church of the autonomous subjects, who recite their critical theories like creeds. In Kant, the embers of a fundamentalism of reason smolder below the skeptical-humanist ashes. In his civil religion, saints are to become lawyers and heroes parliamentarians.

Finally, one must speak of Kant's bourgeoisness in a fourth respect: Kant is the cofounder of a new philosophical genre, anthropology, whose task is to speak—from the bourgeois heights—about the pre- and extrabourgeois foundations of being human: it deals with humanity in the way it is determined as a

species and constituted by nature. Ever since Kant, being an anthropologist means interpreting humanity no longer directly through the nonhuman (the animal) and the suprahuman (God). Anthropology in the modern style is possible only after it has become clear that the human being is the hyperbolic domestic animal which, to the extent that it becomes rational, must look to its own breeding. It can no longer be defined by God's supposed breeding or the presumed diktat of an immediate nature—it is, to put it anachronistically, condemned to educate itself. This is all the more true since one also finds in the emancipated person—and *especially* in the emancipated person—the proclivity for radical evil. For Kant, the paternalism of God is as unbearable as the obtrusiveness of his own natural urges, and in his eyes it is only the daily self-liberation in both directions that places the human being in the bourgeois center as the locus of freedom: nowhere else can the individual successfully pursue his destiny of spontaneous self-formation.

Kant's zeal is to return the passions to bourgeois proportions and to dissolve everything overwhelming into tireless self-assertion. In this, he is the essential thinker of modernity, to the extent that this was the age that wanted to learn how to make a home for itself in civilized finiteness. There is good reason why one of the foundational words of Kant's thinking is: boundary. According to Kant, the thinking that calls itself postmetaphysical is one that has ways not to delete metaphysics, but to replace it. And in truth, the modern world inaugurates the age of substitutability—or in modern parlance: of functional equivalents. Kant's own replacement for metaphysics has traits of a shrewd transaction: instead of participating as an uncertain vassal of the absolute in illusory treasures, the master of Königsberg decided to administer a wealth of clarifications as the master of the house in his own right. At times this was misunderstood as a resignation before higher claims; yet elements of resignation played no role at the core of what

motivated Kant. His compass pointed unerringly at sovereignty, and like a wise businessman who restructures his assets in a crisis, Kant withdrew his deposits from the enterprise of metaphysics, which was no longer creditworthy, in order to invest them in more solid businesses of greater clarity. In a world replete with dangers of expropriation, use one's own reason like an inalienable wealth: with this motto, Kant professed his zeal in embracing the adventure of clarity against all temptations of impoverished thinking and depression.

FICHTE

Philosophy remains a fruitless enterprise without an awakening of the whole individual to it: among philosophers of the modern age, there is no one—with the exception of Martin Heidegger—who taught this insight with as much vehemence and profundity of principle as Johann Gottlieb Fichte. After him, no one could reach the focal point of essential thinking who had not torn himself away, in an existentially transformative turnaround, from his prior belief in the superiority of the things in front of him and outside of him. You must change your life: that is the *cantus firmus* of all thinking under the banner of the modern idea of freedom. But changing oneself means above all: to forgo explaining oneself through the circumstances. Fichte demonstrated what it means to be teacher of idealism in the age of the bourgeoisie. In his speeches and writings there unfolds—with thunderous eloquence, powerful discernment, and fanatical loyalty to an

arduous fundamental idea—the new doctrine of the all-transforming dignity of subjectivity. In the power of its presentation, Fichte's doctrine illustrates the coincidence of analysis and appeal, of argument and initiation. As a logician, Fichte was always also a psychagogue, as a theoretician always also an agitator and master of spiritual exercises. The creator of the scientific doctrine left posterity with the irritating impulse of an argumentative prophetism; with that, he painted the glaring antithesis to the lethargic or athletic calculation involving the stock of problems that has been, since the nineteenth century, inseparable from the spiritless operation of the higher schools.

Referring to Fichte's appellatory genius is thus more than recalling the national-pedagogical masterpiece "Speeches to the German Nation," which the philosopher delivered in Berlin, putting his very life at risk, under the eyes of the French occupying power. In these speeches he came out with the epochal self-confidence of a man who seems to know that only a world spirit at the lectern would be able to provide a remedy to the world spirit on horseback. If Bonaparte appeared on the world stage as the founder of a bourgeois empire, Fichte countered with the foundation of his empire of the spirit on the stage of ideas. Many clichés about the struggle between French Materialists and German Idealists that reverberate to this day have their substantive origins in this antithesis. Fichte's function as the voice in the wilderness, which he simultaneously discovered and justified, was rooted in the principle of his philosophy itself, according to which seizing freedom means no less than a resurrection from the dead—the very dead that we have always been in Fichte's mind, as long as we, dazed by the appearance of the objectively independent Being before us, vegetate in the idol worship of external reality. In the eyes of the furious teacher of freedom, the bourgeois world as a whole is a realm of the dead: for over the thoughts, motives, and works of the overwhelming majority is spread the veil of dogmatic

and ontological delusion. Whoever lives under the spell of this death-bringing ignorance of the self could, as Fichte put it, be led more likely to think of himself as a piece of lava from the moon than as an I.

Fichte's implacable intervention lays bare a consequential dilemma in the critical moral communication in modern societies: How is the communication between the living and the living dead to be accomplished? How can the nonalienated turn toward the alienated in the first place? Indeed, must the living not always despair of the unconvertible dead? From the days of early philosophy every society in Europe had to deal with the provocations from an elite of those who are truly alive and who truly understand. The civil war between the philosophical spirit and the common mind is a constant in the intellectual history of old Europe. But where the ancient wise wrapped themselves in silence before the unchangeably stupid mass, the modern wise, as teachers of enlightenment, must go on the pedagogical offensive. The fundamentalism of conscious living reached a principled acuity in Fichte.

And in fact, under the enlightened, vicious glance of the philosophers, the entire sphere of society presents itself for the first time as an alienated world, populated by beings whose roots of the ability to be free have been cut off by their erroneous belief in the autonomous, *a priori* existence of things: the alienated human spends his days as a slave of his subjection to a prearranged massif of facts. For him, the autonomous thing is master; where the thing rules, death is in power. But the scientific doctrine—along with its moral supplement: the instructions for a blessed life—is the logical trumpet that sounds the resurrection from the grave of objectivism. Anyone who hears and understands it can raise himself up to be a partisan of freedom. The resurrected subject will feel the urge to volunteer for the campaign of moral modernity by which the *ancien régime* of internal and external obstacles to

humanity shall be overthrown once and for all; its place shall and must be taken by a realm of reason-guided freedom, which has never before been realized on earth. The future as projected by the idealist will be moral and reasoned, or there will not be one. For Fichte there was simply no doubt that the logical-moral resurrection of the subjects and the political revolution of the polity converged. It was his conviction that it had to be possible to bring to an end the age of perfected sinfulness and the wanton persistence of all bearers of error in their positions, just as the obsolete feudal constitution of society had witnessed its deserved downfall in the French Revolution.

As the discoverer of alienated subjectivity, Fichte stands at the beginning of an era of mighty projects of philosophical emancipation, by which the great politics of *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity) was called onto the stage: where there was alienation, there was to be *Eigentlichkeit*—be it the authenticity of the political commune, which self-examines and governs itself, or be it the authenticity of God, who shines through in overflowing teachers and moral entrepreneurs. Use yourself to bring forth a better world: that is the categorical imperative of the idealist. In fact, wherever the hope was kept alive that modern societies could, their systematic entelechies notwithstanding, in the end form something like a reasonable identity, Fichte was always present as an explicit and implicit ally.

Looking back over the age of great moral politics, we recognize, of course, how such lofty hopes have dragged humanity into a potentially violent cycle of enthusiasms and disillusionment. It would appear that after all of this, we are not condemned to freedom, but to a clarification of our illusions from the purview of our dreams of freedom. If our age, rightly or wrongly, describes itself so frequently as an epoch of postmetaphysical thinking, it does so not least because, mindful of the two-hundred-year-long process of heroic philosophies of freedom, it has come to mistrust the

prophetic moral competence of master thinkers willing to employ violence. To be sure: it would go too far to place the blame for the disasters of modernity on the shoulders of the great philosophers. And yet, one should investigate what is true in the suspicion against all big thinking, which posits the thesis that whoever sows illusions in the technological age will reap world wars. The epoch of ideologies or secular religions did in fact turn for us into a school of disenchantment: the manic privilege of the great philosophy of history, namely, to measure the movement of the world solely by the compass of reason and freedom, has been dashed by the power of circumstances. That is why a renewed analytical or deconstructivist caution, regardless of whether it is pursuing psychological or sign-critical paths, must draw its consequences from the failure of those ideologies that have become embroiled in modernity's calamitous history as enthusiasms that assumed global power.

By all rights, this dearly bought skepticism—one could call it postillusionistic—may also encompass Fichte's work and reputation, for he is the true progenitor of the lofty delusion that the life of the human species proceeds in accordance with a fixed plan, which will surely be attained because it must be and is supposed to be attained. Fichte's continuing importance—he himself would surely not have shied away from the term *immortality*—is thus not found in the area of prophetic history. The necessary unity of reason, morality, and the course of the world postulated by Fichte no longer impresses anyone today. We have also moved far away from the idealistic victim-habit of wasting a person as the medium of a transpersonal reason. Fichte's greatness will reveal itself above all to those who muster the patience to immerse themselves in his analysis—unsurpassed in its lucidity—of the structures of subjectivity. Only after Fichte could the question of what it actually means to be an "I" become a provocation to Western thinking. Fichte therefore remains an involuntary ally of all those who, even

under the impression of the advancing technological remaking of all concepts of the world and life, wish to take their orientation from the non-indifference of the fact that I can experience myself as "I." It is precisely when the excesses of the doctrines of autonomous subjectivity have been overcome that the mystery of the possibility of I-ness truly shines quite clearly within the scattered totality of the world. The radiance of this mystery will forever retain some of the light of Fichte's intelligence. Fichte's "I" is an action that liberates a moral teaching: where the I experiences itself, it means the impossibility of being pitiful. Even if one posits that God is a meaningless concept, an existential impulse of incalculable consequence flows from the I-ness described with Fichte's means. I am to take the fact of my existence as myself as lightly and as seriously as though my I-ness were God's last chance.

HEGEL

One must be at the end of one's rope to be able to speak the truth—this conviction is woven into all of Hegel's work like a tear-resistant thread. With it, Hegel elevated the fundamental motif of Plato's epistemology to monumental heights: realizing means remembering; comprehending means reconstructing. The thinker whose system has been described—not without good reason—as the consummation of occidental or Christian-Platonic metaphysics was by his very nature the metaphysician of perfection. After Hegel, thinking philosophically means bringing home the harvest of existence; but the only thing that makes it home is what can make itself at home in everything: the spirit. In Hegel, this spirit takes its time; it has and makes history: by way of skulls and step-by-step it enters into the final domesticity, its own self; the wine of truth is extracted from a late harvest. Hegel's typical times are therefore fall and evening; his preferred figure

of thought is the deduction; his innermost color is gray, so closely associated with the night. Under his gaze, all scenery becomes an evening landscape, every view must become a final tableau. Terminal knowledge appears at the advanced hour, when the concept disconnects itself from the experience in order to arrange itself in balance sheets for all eternity. Having lived means everything. A life lived to the end will have been a good one if the completed life is tantamount to the permeation of the spirit completing possession of itself. Such a striving for entry into fullness shows that Hegel's spirit, too, for all the newly won openness to Becoming, is aimed at a time after the end of time.

If Becoming is a school, it must eventually lead to a graduation; if it is a process, it cannot lack the moment of judgment. In this sense, Hegel is the thinker of maturity; his phenomenology as well as his encyclopedia offer programs for a reason that must pass through a specific curriculum. Only in the name of maturity can the historical and the metaphysical meaning be reduced to a common denominator. If the spirit accedes to its diffusion through time, it does so only in order to mature through it for the end of time and the time beyond time. Our attachment to what is temporary shall pass, until everything has transmuted into ash and knowledge. In Hegel the secret of ancient philosophy is revealed: that thinking metaphysically has always meant thinking in consummations. Hegel had the courage to answer the question about the "when" of consummation with reference to himself; his response was: now. Through dialectic, grandiosity assumes method. Thanks to his system, Hegel believed that he had thought his way into the timeless heart of Time. The spirit that speaks through his work has found reason for the thesis: my time is ripe; the world process as a whole has gone on the record; today what I began back in the day when I rose in the East must be perfected. What was passion has become archive. All earlier thinking, contemplated from Hegel's late Now, appears as

preparatory and forward-leading to qualifying the spirit in itself as the Absolute. If the moment of the consummation of knowledge has arrived, it divides time into a "prior" and a "here-and-now." The capacity for the "here-and-now" is a function of "being at one's end." But where, through Hegel, metaphysics expresses itself in such elevated richness, it also becomes ripe for queries by spirits of contradiction: Can mere humans, can finite intellects be at the end in any meaningful way? Can they claim of themselves—with reasons that are more than overblown pretensions—that they themselves signal and embody the end?

Accounting for the magic and the terror of metaphysics of the Hegelian type is that it still found the strength to answer these questions with a resolute Yes. This Yes divides the mass of mortals into participants and nonparticipants in the consummation; this division of humanity can be largely equated with that of individuals who understand Hegel and those who are unable to. Hegel and his followers are thus the ones who share in the consummation of knowledge. They become finite pillars of the infinite that has penetrated to itself, safely sheltered within the unending end of history. Though most mortals cling to the provisional and live out their lives miserably in obfuscations and self-will, for the philosophers of consummation it is beyond doubt that the circle of the spirit's self-realization has been able to close in elevated individuals. From Hegel's perspective, such exceptions to the norm of human smallness are rightly called world-historical individuals, provided they are functionaries and subjects of the consummation of the world and of knowledge. Under the aspect of perfection and consummation, the great thinker is intimately bound up with the great doer. In a dream sequence of his *Wintermärchen* (*A Winter's Tale*), Heinrich Heine describes a hooded figure who follows closely behind the poet with an ax in its hand: "I am the deed to your thoughts." Hegel could have, in dream and in real life, confronted the conqueror and legislator Napoleon with the

pronouncement: I am the thought to your deed. That means no less than that the political history of the world would have arrived at its end "chiefly" through the establishment of the postrevolutionary bourgeois state under the rule of law. In this state the working-through of the spirit for the freedom of all would have developed to the consummate fact; the recognition of all through all would have been formally carried out through the entry of all into the status of citizenship. Hegel was evidently willing—to the degree to which this accomplishment was to be attested with personal names—to link the name of the violent Corsican with his own; in fact, above the names of both there stands—in spite of weighty differences between the French Empire and Hegelian Prussia—a common sign: the breakthrough to the accomplished constitutional state. From the perception of world history, Code Civil and Philosophy of Law are in tune. The way in which the proper names of Hegel or Napoleon appear in the finale of the lofty tale of the good end of history makes evident how, in Hegel's logic, the individual is reconciled with the general: by wearing themselves out in what appear to be their own missions, the great individuals play their role in the heroic epic of the universal events of freedom and truth; by exerting their powers to the utmost in the arena of contemporary doing and thinking, the individuals transform themselves into crystals of the Absolute; their life becomes bright under a sky of supreme significances. In this context, being significant means having captured a place in the Whole as something incidental. The eminent human being is always a worker in the vineyard of consummations. Hegel's doctrine of the Great Man encapsulates the essence of his theology of specialness; it replaces the nobility of the sword of the feudal age with the nobility of meaning for philosophical-bourgeois historiography. Just as in the tradition of Saint John the word became flesh so as to mediate God to the world, in Hegel's doctrine of specialness, the world spirit becomes an individual and dwells among us—and

why not, then, in the shape of generals, classicists, and professors? So much the better for contemporaries if they are capable of perceiving their glory on horseback or at the lectern—not to forget the book fairs, where everything also revolves around their appearance. The great individual is entirely illuminated by significance; he burns up without a remnant in his historical task, so as to be no more than a figure in its constellation. If the small individual remains unmentionable, because—once one subtracts his desires for prestige devoid of any accomplishments—there is nothing of significance to say, the great individual transforms himself into pure pronouncement. He becomes entirely deed, a realized figure, a pure cross between strength and moment. He sublates himself in the transfiguration-body of his deeds and creations.

One may call the effects of Hegel's thinking prodigious in the full sense of the word. It spawned a school and a counterschool; it provoked the instincts of preservation as much as those of revolt. His undecidable hovering between dissolving and fixating all things allowed both revolutionaries and sclerotics to invoke Hegel convincingly. If one discovered in Lenin's brain ideas of revolution and calcifications, both stemmed from the master's legacy. Already in Hegel himself, especially in his Berlin honors, it was never quite clear whether everything was in flux or everything had settled down. Alongside the order-thinkers who wanted to inherit Hegel's realm like some constitutional monarchy, agitated choruses of learned malcontents stepped onto the stage who rebelled against the prospect of spending the rest of their days as pensioners of consummated idealism.

Ever since Hegel, it can be denied that history is essentially over. Much remains to be done in the world—this becomes the battle cry of post-Hegelian rational politics; there are still things unsaid in the house of the self—this becomes the guiding idea of the creations of post-Hegelian discourse. New dancing stars still wish to be born, stars about whom no retrospective knows

anything. A forward-driving interest in the unfinished awakens; the unredeemed, unliberated announces its claims to cultural and philosophical consideration. Reconciliation now wants to be conceived of much more broadly than any idealist ever contemplated. All thinking that dates itself in Hegelian manner after Hegel professes an interest in postponing the consummation until justice has been done also to entities still unreconciled—be they the proletariat, women, the body, the earth, the mad, the child, the animal. Every one of these themes has become the subject of a specific millenarianism. The play of consummation denial and reconciliation postponement in the name of an unredeemed group shapes the struggles of ideas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on the Marxist as well as the existentialist wings—to mention only the two mightiest post-Hegelianisms. In all of these endeavors, the hour of consummation was suspended until a later time—history itself became a fighting game for additional demands. All young Hegelians are ontological irridentists. Too much illness and too much alienation are fracturing the world for the also-grieved and also-alienated intelligentsia to be allowed to indulge in the enlightened after-work hours. Eventually, the party that attacked the claim of consummation had to be driven to the point at which the motif of consummation itself was shattered. The modern world conceives of itself as the essentially never-consummated, and its theory must bring itself to reflect this fact. Thus, no moment in time is suitable any longer to be the Now of the consummated present. The postponement steals the march on the present; Being needs to be understood as time. The interest in identity is overtaken by that in difference; dissemination gains the upper hand over collection; postponement is playing its game already in the very heart of presence. There commences an age to which projects and credits mean more than retrospectives and sums; in it, the theoretical need can longer satisfy itself in vespertine surveys of what has been achieved.

In fact, postmetaphysical reason is condemned to an orientation toward the future. The future is what mere thought cannot cope with. Whether the future will bring salvation remains uncertain for those alive today. Is it not more likely that in the future, too, one will have to save oneself from saviors? After all the Hegelianizing experiments with the real, we know that an ailing world cannot be helped with crude, effusive remedies. Not a few disappointed metaphysicians are now confessing their resentment against an ungrateful and incurable reality. Like resigned clinicians, they tend to send this world, this incorrigible world, home to die. Yet the rage of these helpless helpers matters little. One may ask whether philosophers, after everything that has happened, can continue to think of themselves as the physicians of culture, at all. Should they come to terms with the fact that they seem more unmasked than those who also cannot help? Have not other helpers, other healers long since supplanted them with the public—and for reasons that can hardly be refuted for the time being? What can thinkers still fascinated by the magic of consummation accomplish in the future other than warning their clients of themselves? Is not the point now to mature into immaturity? The remembrance of Hegel and the resplendent wretchedness of his successes may be useful for understanding why, in the methodological quarrel of the world physicians, individual philosophers—post-Hegelian as well as non-Hegelian—will continue to have their say, even if much more modestly.

SCHELLING

The image of the philosopher Schelling is shaped above all by the shimmering myth of his youth. With a demonic-seeming self-assurance, the twenty year old assumed the leadership of German philosophy around 1800, which at that time, as the spiritual supplement to the French Revolution, as it were, represented the avant-garde of world thought. Writing in radiant prose, the young Schelling drafted a series of systemic sketches that performed, before the eyes of an amazed public, a celestial journey of speculative reason. He seemed to have discovered a process of speaking from the vantage point of the Absolute as though from a secure position. No matter what objects the young man touched, everything transformed itself under his vigorous diction into a flight of fancy and speculative thunderstorm. It was as though the goal was to prove that finally a confidant of God was once again among us. Schelling drove the tone of finality to the extreme and

elevated the oscillation between extreme viewpoints into the rank of a process. When he carried out the leap from Fichtean philosophy of consciousness to natural philosophy, the reputation of frivolity—indeed, inconsistency—attached itself to him, though it would escape most of his critics that there was a plausible methodology in this about-face. And so it was no surprise that from an early point in his career, he already encountered not only admiring sympathy, but also skepticism and hostile suspicion. It is not true that Schelling—as Hegel spitefully remarked—underwent his education in front of the audience; but it is true that the young author, overwhelmed by his own élan, also produced himself before a public in which there were many who stared at his brilliant feats with the lizard gaze of unmoved mediocrity. Yet this hardly mattered, as long as Schelling was able to hold his ground as the idol of the early generation of Romantics. His evangelical fanfare about nature creatively at work within us sounded irresistible. His youthful work, especially from the time of Schelling's felicitous association with the well-disposed Goethe, reflects a pleromatic world-moment—it attests to a singular omnipotence of intelligence in the fullness of its epoch. It may be that this Schellingian moment has lapsed irretrievable into the past; nevertheless, out of it there arose a problem in which contemporary thinking can also recognize itself. For in his abrupt turn to natural philosophy, Schelling discovered the motif of the enabling past of consciousness without which there would not exist the categories of the subconscious and of cognitive evolution, which are crucial to modern thought. It is only in their Mesmerian-magical attitude that Schelling's breakthroughs to logical modernity remain bound to the Romantic horizon; substantively, Schelling pursued a natural history of freedom as the early developmental stage of reason. In fact, the young philosopher listened carefully—like an eager midwife—at the womb of nature pregnant with spirit, so as to discern deep within it the heartbeat of a self-consciousness as

yet unborn. From his assistance in the birth of consciousness from the still unconscious, Schelling derived the insight that would make him the primus among the great theoreticians of art in the modern age.

There is a second myth about Schelling, this one concerning the darkening of the mind of the aging genius. Some believed they could detect in the later Schelling the sadness of the fallen angel, and have tried to interpret the trajectory of his life as the unavoidable decline after a beginning at an unsurpassable height—as though we were dealing with a Rimbaud of speculative reason. Some writers went so far as to ponder what kind of image of Schelling would have been passed down if the hero of the mighty intellect had died—like Novalis—as a young man. It is indeed true that the later Schelling made it difficult for all those who were interested only in idealistic hero-worship. The second half of his life stood undeniably in the shadow of a growing complication. This did not have the character of a decline, however, but attests to a magnificent process of growing seriousness and compelling advancement in the awareness of difficulties. In hidden decades, Schelling succeeded in breaking the illustrious vise of his apparent perfection at an early age, and shifted the foundations of his thinking into layers of problems to which no idealistic thinker before him had penetrated. Now the terror at the heart of the world became visible to him, and he recognized melancholy as the deepest stratum of nature. In incomparably dense and dark studies, he contemplated Evil as an attractive world power; he probed the eerie power of the Base to set itself up as the Lofty as the sinister driving force behind the course of the world; he brooded on the unfathomable abyss of God with a tenacity that seemed less suited to Munich in the early nineteenth century than to Alexandria in the third century CE.

If one wanted to give a label to the thrust of Schelling's later works, one would have to speak of the conquest of brokenness.

Schelling's late *oeuvre* offers the first great monument to a post-narcissistic exertion of reason. His contemplation immerses itself in the finiteness and historicity of reason; it gives room to the inkling that philosophy's reach for the One and the Whole of the nature of reality and the openness of becoming has always missed the mark. In many respects, but above all where Schelling brings out the precedence of the future within the fabric of time, this thinking anticipates the new beginning of philosophical questioning in Heidegger. Schelling's late *oeuvre* was erected in protracted, virtually subterranean processes far removed from the everyday journalistic excitations of the *Vormärz* era, and entirely in the shadow of Hegel's triumphalist seductions. The result was the unfair appearance that the older Schelling represented merely a classical relic who had remained bound to positions that had been overtaken by the *Zeitgeist.*

That impression was reinforced by the debacle of Schelling's Berlin lectures on the philosophy of revelation, when the sixty-five-year-old philosopher failed before an initially fascinated but then bored audience with his theosophical and historiosophical elusions. Schelling contributed in no small measure to the misjudgment of himself, above all because he was barely able to muster the strength to finish a treatise and hid from completing major works he was planning in endless procrastination—as though he were belatedly frightened by his early heroic accomplishments. Added to this was that his later style became clouded and convoluted and rarely again found its way back to the "resonant certainty of victory" of his early pronouncements. In Schelling's late style, with its wondrous complexity and melancholy chiaroscuro, there manifests itself the difficult farewell to the epoch's dream of the omnipotence of reason. Schelling's late prose shows the painful mask of an idealism that must rally its best forces to bring itself back within the boundaries of mortal reflection. At the same time, idealism's self-restraint was for Schelling the necessary condition

for opening thinking up to the future. It is here that the philosophy of the Not-Yet takes its beginning.

In Schelling's magnificent turning away from the unseemly grandiosities of reason, the signature of contemporary thinking reveals itself authentically for the first time. Schelling's most prominent student, King Maximilian of Bavaria, was ahead of the received opinion of his day when he had these words carved into the memorial to the philosopher who died in 1854: "To the first thinker of Germany." Neither Neo-Kantianism, nor Neo-Hegelianism, nor the phenomenological movement inaugurated by Husserl was able to entirely disavow the royal verdict. Through the variety of his work and the exertions of his pathways of thought, Schelling conveyed to posterity an idea of the price of maturity.

SCHOPENHAUER

Schopenhauer was the first eminent thinker who left the Western Church of Reason. Alongside Marx and the Young Hegelians, it was he who carried out the revolutionary break in nineteenth-century thought in the most principled way. With him there begins the long agony of the good foundation; he bids a concise farewell to the Greek and Judeo-Christian theologies. For him, what was most absolutely real had ceased to be a godlike, reasonable, and just spiritual being. With his doctrine of the Will, the theory of the foundation of the world leaps from the kind of pious rationalism that had prevailed since the days of Plato to a recognition—characterized by horror and amazement—of the arational. Schopenhauer was the first who identified Being's energetic and instinctive nature which is free of reason. In that, he is one of the fathers of the century of psychoanalysis; in the future he could yet turn out to be a distant patron of and kin to

an age of chaos theory and systemics. And over the long term his most important contribution to intellectual history could be that he opened the European doors to the Asian wisdom traditions, especially Buddhism, with the utmost respect.

It may be that his doctrine of the resignation of the Will must sound even stranger to the hunger for life among the inhabitants of the First World today than it would have to Schopenhauer's contemporaries, the progressive positivists and the world revolutionaries with their faith in humanity; yet today, as well, it reminds us that the unbounded hunger for life will not be able to solve the problems created by its free exercise by intensifying itself even more. Schopenhauer could have authored this statement: only despair can still save us; of course, he spoke not of despair, but of renunciation. For modern people, *renunciation* is the most difficult word in the world. Schopenhauer called it out against the roaring surf. After him, questions regarding the ethical are more radically open than ever before.

KIERKEGAARD

Historism and evolutionism—the two legacies of the nineteenth century to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—have seared into the conviction of the later-born the insipid tenet that every thought is the product of its time. Whoever accepts this seems at first to have struck a good bargain, for historism frees the individual from the monstrous weight of the *philosophia perennis* and offers the possibility of traveling through time with lighter baggage. It suffices to place oneself at the leading edge of the development as a way of dealing with the drawback of relativism, that of one's own obsolescence. Historical thinking seeks to replace the absolute but illusory sovereignty that metaphysics granted with the relative sovereignty of thinking that is allowed to regard itself as advanced. Kierkegaard can teach us, however, that historism is a trick for attaining the vantage point of postmetaphysics at half the price. For Kierkegaard,

radical thinking is not the progeny of its time; it is the acknowledgment of its facticity.

The most important qualifier by which more recent thinkers have sought to mark out their place within the line of fundamental epochal positions and philosophical systems is without a doubt a date: after Hegel. The latter has been associated with a dual suggestion. For one, the formula "after Hegel" stands for the notion that Hegel's work completed what had been begun in ancient Greece. Henceforth, the history of philosophy can be systematically presented as the epic of the concept that penetrates itself. But if the history of the mind is simultaneously the substance of world history, the consummation of the one implies also the consummation of the other.

When following the great migration of the mind from Ionia to Jena, there begins an endless period of leisure, when the fruits of the historical battles can be contemplatively and playfully enjoyed. In this framework, dating oneself "post-Hegel" means making a place for oneself as a gratefully enlightened epigone in a world that is in principle finished.

But of course the date "after Hegel" also describes the protest against the idyll of the philosophy of history. For it corresponds to the spontaneous life experience of most people that in their case the reasonable is not yet the real and the real is not yet the reasonable. This objection leads to the position of the Young Hegelians in the broader sense. Their chief complaint against Hegel is only that he was premature. If they have a critical appreciation of the master's work, it is not as the final but the penultimate chapter of history. They insist on the distinction that the consummation of the theory by no means implies already its practical realization; rather, from now until further notice one must continually "move" from theory to praxis. This group of post-Hegelians postpones the moment of consummation to a later date, until at long last justice will have been done also to the claims of those entities

skipped over by Hegel's mind: the proletariat, women, the marginalized, colonized peoples, the mentally and emotionally ill, discriminated minorities, and, finally, all of enslaved nature. All of these entities are possible subjects and drivers of ongoing history to the degree that they put forth demands by virtue of their informed discontent, demands that must be met through historical labors and struggles before the Now of the jaded posthistory can dawn. That is why the root slogan of unsatisfied post-Hegelianism is: the struggle continues. The final work remains to be done. The theory that is still engaged in the struggle presents itself as the critical one: it carries the torch of truth through a world not yet real; it totalizes the perspective of the dissatisfied part onto the sanctimonious whole. Its date is the period of the transition from theoretical anticipation to practical consummation: after Hegel—before the empire of reason.

If one follows merely chronology, one might expect from Kierkegaard nothing other than a variation of post-Hegelian thinking. In actuality, Kierkegaard broke with the metaphysical scheme of consummation as a whole and located himself in a time that no longer had anything in common with the extended final games of the Enlightenment and the end of history. With that, he imparted a completely different meaning to the position "post-Hegel," one that means neither the contented awareness of accomplished absolute reflection, nor the critical postponement of consummation. For a thinking in the time of existence, the issue is not to assume some position left open by Hegel. Rather, the name "Hegel" stands for the massif of metaphysics as a whole from which existential thinking seeks to break away by no longer leaning on what is objective, but by keeping open the unfathomableness of its subjectivity. Anyone who intends to break with Hegel in full awareness of doing so must simultaneously reject along with him the Platonic legacy and the better part of Christian theology.

Kierkegaard's existential reflection uncovers for itself and his contemporaries the necessity of deeper dates: if subjectivity is the truth (and the untruth), the imperative is to date oneself in a destructive sense after Plato and in an absurd sense after and yet contemporaneous with Christ. Plato had established philosophy as metaphysics when he implanted in it the masterful claim of transcending the imperfect to the perfect, the finite to the infinite. These philosophical transcendencies had the quality of sublime regressions in which the existing intellect groped its way to preexistential intuitions. The fundamental metaphysical act—transcendence—means precisely this: withdrawing from time to regain the origin in the Absolute.

Kierkegaard radically questioned this tendency of philosophy; for him it was impossible to rise into the Timeless on the light thread of concepts. The human mind's journey home to God, undertaken time and again since the days of Plato and the Church Fathers, strikes him as a treacherous career into which the individual in the metaphysical world age allowed himself to be enticed—not least under the banner of ruling Christianity. But it is the truth of subjectivity to return, after all upswings, to its discord and its doubt. For Kierkegaard this manifested itself especially in the act of faith, by which the human being after Christ defied the abyss of the unbelievableness of Christian doctrines. Only a Christianity that was metaphysized and inflated into sacral folklore of power could imagine that the tradition of the martyrs, the saints, and the fathers of theology adds up to evidence upon which the individual believer can look back just as calmly as the philosopher can upon his inner archetypes. For Kierkegaard, however, the individual stands before the Christian legend utterly dumbfounded. Should he decide to take up the mantle of discipleship, then it certainly should not be because so many power mongers, hysterics, and conformists have preceded him along this path. Faith is valid only because of a decision of trust for

which external supporting reasons cannot be adduced in the final analysis. To Kierkegaard, believing does not mean giving in to a comfortable urge of imitation in the ecclesiastical and imperial framework, but making a choice in the face of the unbelievable. In this choice "as for the first time" Kierkegaard discovers the heartbeat of existential time that is open to the future. With it, there opens up the possibility for something essentially new that would be valid not only by virtue of its similarity with eternal models. In this sense one can contend that the thinking of radical modernity floating in experiments begins with Kierkegaard. He was the first to enter the age of doubt, suspicion, and the creative decision.

MARX

The history of Marx's writings could tempt the contemporary commentator into the suggestive remark that all history is the history of battles among interpreters. In its origin, the mania of interpretation is a *furor theologicus*, and it flourishes best in a climate of militant monotheisms. Nowhere is this more clearly evident than in the history of Christianity, which has for eighteen hundred years, with an unparalleled power-hungry will to serve and understand, cultivated a small bundle of texts known as the New Testament. Like none other, the example of Christianity demonstrates the world history-making dominance of the interpreters over the text. In monumental strokes, Romanized Catholicism embodies the ideal type of a bureaucratically moderated, hermeneutical dictatorship; in it, the unity of episcopal monarchy and the power of interpretation has been thought through and realized to the utmost degree. *Auctoritas, non veritas facit*

legem: The interpreter, not the text, makes the law. The party that is truly always right resides in the First Rome, not the Third (i.e., Moscow). That it is the interpreter who gives voice to the words of the master: this rule holds not only for old, evangelically radiating textual material that is suitable as the founding matter for churches; it can also be demonstrated in para-evangelical writings from more recent times.

Occasionally the names of the three major writers Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, each of whom—in his own way—carried the twilights of the nineteenth century into the twentieth, are mentioned in the same breath, and observers have sought to detect in them a common denominator that has been called their dysangelical mission. They are regarded, especially by representatives of Christian humanism, as bearers of the three obtrusively negative messages about the basic forces of human reality with which the citizens of modernity have had to contend ever since: the dominance of the conditions of production over idealistic fictions; the dominance of the vital functions—also known as the will to power—over symbolic systems; the dominance of the unconscious or instinctive nature over human self-awareness. With three voices the dysangelists seemed to be proclaiming one and the same doom: you are prisoners of structures and systems. The truth will make you unfree. In this view, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, the dark messengers, are the bearers of truths that do not lift up and unite, but dissolve and weigh down.

Of course, if one takes a closer look it becomes apparent that the three authors exerted entirely different effects than those of eschatological heralds of human entanglement or decentering. On the contrary, all three, each in his own way, found forms of succession that one would have to call apostolic, were that expression not already so clearly colonized by the Christian paradigm. Marx, like Nietzsche and Freud, became the originator of texts and tendencies upon which the law of the dominance of

interpreters asserted itself with the utmost power. They all sought and found agile readers who in their writings detected the slogans for careers, indeed, the pretexts for coups, the establishment of societies, and radical revolutions in thinking and ways of living. In addition, their works attest the modern teaching role of nonprofessors—they reveal the extent to which the university has become alienated since the nineteenth century from the crucial creative minds. As for the interpreters of the modern masters, it is true of them as well that empires, churches, and their schools are the important employers—and where it becomes possible, as in empowered Marxism, to fuse these three entities into a single centralized power that creates meaning, functionaries who interpret the classics enjoy the unbridled privilege of an aristocracy melded with the clergy.

In a totalitarian system, the dominance of the secondary can situate itself piously beneath the canopy of the master texts. Where sects are in power, loyalty and betrayal become indistinguishable. Until recently it was also normal among Western Marxists to fantasize that the master himself would have accepted certain deviations from his doctrines with applause. As one of the last father figures of the truth, Marx implanted in his sons the belief that dissent from the father also still came from the father. The Church of Marxism wanted to wander through history as a procedural unit of Father, Son, and Critique. I interpret, therefore I am somebody: exegesis in conformity with the times opens up access to positions in the sphere of power. Wherever sacred or classic writings are encumbered by the unreasonable expectation of establishing empires, churches, and schools, the interpreters secure for themselves exquisite places within the hierarchies. Has great history not always been the realm of the soldiers of meaning? If one accepts figures such as Lenin and Stalin, Mao Zedong and Pol Pot as Marx interpreters in their own right, this would make Marxism, seen through the prism of its unscrupulous appropriators,

without doubt the eminent interpretive power complex of modern intellectual history. There was a good reason why Stalin, in his day the reigning *pontifex maximus* of Marxist doctrine, could feel superior to his rival in Rome when he posed the ominous question of how many divisions the pope had.

In the wake of the political and economic debacle of the dictatorships of Marxist interpreters in so many countries—who claimed that they constituted no less than a second world—the question arises of how many readers Marx had, and among those, how many good ones.

To be sure, early on there were already intelligent efforts, especially within Western Marxisms, to defend Marx against his armed devotees. Beginning in the 1920s, it was *de rigeur* to regard Marx as a misunderstood great man, whose true intentions could be discerned only through the path of a critical gnosis. Here the true Marx was contrasted to the Marx of real-life consequences: the analyst of systems to the utopian, the scientist of structures to the humanistic ideologue. In such niches of leftist irony, the author of *Das Kapital* was able to survive into the 1970s as the dissident of the misfortune that had written his name on its banners. After the disappearance of the ghostly ideological entity that was the Soviet Union, the question arose anew whether the Marxist writings should be given the chance to be disencumbered from the history of what they had wrought. Will they be exonerated because their true intentions can be shown to have been different? Can they invite another reading, as though the first waves of interpretation have subsided like mere projections and transgressions on the part of self-proclaimed false apostles? In fact, the texts exist, still and as if for the first time, like some gloomy yet liberated country from which the occupiers have withdrawn. Surely, none of the few travelers in the new textual lands still believe that they can shed a direct light on the conditions of the advanced financial and media society. A generation will probably

pass before Marx in the text will be read the way the authors most closely related to him are already today read on occasion, specifically Fichte, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Kierkegaard: as a fateful figure in the endgame of metaphysics, which seemed to have reached its "consummation" in a certain way in German Idealism, and which yet remained alive in some eerie manner in its supposedly post-metaphysical heirs. One will then realize that the layer of basic philosophical concepts in Marx's *oeuvre* represents a developed aggregate state of Fichte's idea of alienation. In this sense one can say that Marxism was a footnote to German Idealism, and that it embedded a metastasis of the Gnostic notion of alienation into the intellectual realm of the twentieth century.

The good reader of the future will become attentive in Marx's texts to the concepts and metaphors under which the longest dreams of classical metaphysics donned a contemporary disguise—especially the all-pervading phantasm of the powerful self-generation of the historical subject and the crypto-theological motif of the recovery of the original fullness of self by the "producers" in a world freed from money. These basic elements of Marx's philosophical fiction of a "proletarian reason" become visible as soon as one immerses oneself in his work with the kind of mixture of curiosity and equanimity that became possible only with the waning of the religious war over exegesis. One can echo Günter Schulte—to whom we owe the most penetrating recent work on the Messianic critic of political economy—in asking, "Do you know Marx?"; and one can second the author's conviction that a real knowledge of Marx cannot exist as long as his new readers do not participate in the adventure of a "critique of proletarian reason."[1] Thus, a renewed knowledge of Marx does not have the purpose of defiantly disseminating once again a compromised classic of social criticism in a time removed from critique. Rather, reconstructing the Marxian inspirations means entering into the ghostly history of concepts which—as a force that has

become a state, a spirit that has become technique, and as all-intertwining money—are sucking at the life of individuals more than ever before. Without a doubt, Marx's future theoretical fame will be linked to his achievements as the conjurer of dead labor. The core of his critique of political economy is necromancy: as the hero who descends to the realm of the dead to contend with the shadows of values, Marx remains uncannily relevant also for the present. The undead—which walks among humans as the value of money and which, as a laughing communicator, strips the living of time and souls—rules today almost without any pretexts over the advanced societies. Work, communication, art, and love belong here entirely to the endgame of money. These form the substance of contemporary media and experiential time. And because money requires time for its utilization, so-called great history is also continuing in some eerie way; it is a game that is always played for extra time. Yet such history is no longer the conversation of the living with the dead about the goodness of the world, but the ever more thorough pervasion of the living by the economized specter. The money soul peers ever more undisguised out of the human subjectivity of our time: a society of bought buyers and of prostituted prostitutes is making a place for itself in globalized market conditions. Classic liberal laissez-faire is becoming explicit as the postmodern sucking and letting oneself be sucked. Telecommunication is increasingly difficult to distinguish from tele-vampirism. Tele-viewers and tele-suckers draw from a liquefied world which hardly still knows what a resistant or autonomous life might be. Is it not possible that a time is coming when those who do not wish to speak of vampirism should also be silent about philosophy? If that is the case, it would most definitely be the time of Marx's second chance.

NIETZSCHE

An irritant to democrats and a folly to professors, the name Friedrich Nietzsche still makes the hearts of artists and revisionists beat faster. The reason behind the uneven history of how he has been received was planted by Nietzsche's work itself—by taking from some more than they are willing to give up, and giving to others more than they can initially take. That is why the latter are fascinated and the former harbor reservations. If Nietzsche on the one hand undermined the traditional worldviews of moral earnestness, he on the other hand put into the world an aesthetic seriousness that is difficult to grasp even for those who like to invoke him to justify themselves.

Friends and enemies of Nietzsche agree on only one thing: namely, to define his work as a kind of artists' metaphysics; they recognize it—for good and ill—as a turning point in intellectual history toward the aesthetic *Weltanschauung*. What is difficult for

both parties is a cogent answer to the question of from where the aesthetic *Weltanschauung*—shrouded in praise and warnings—derives its evolutionary heft. No matter how often one invokes the formula about the aesthetic justification of existence, as long as it is not made clear to what extent the aesthetic could be considered as a basis for justifying the most serious of all things—human life as a whole—in the first place, one is merely engaged in a seemingly dangerous game of language. For Nietzsche, an aesthetic *Weltanschauung* does not mean the release of frivolousness, nor does it satisfy the demand for a discounted ethic for artists and others who never became adults. The usual deserters of the principle of reality will not get their money's worth from Nietzsche. For under the code of the aesthetic, Nietzsche discovers another horizon of dire situations of which the traditional culture of war as the ultimate emergency—with all its classicistic stereotypes—knows nothing. For the male youth in ancient cities and modern nation-states, it is surely serious enough when they are supposed to be ready to defend the existence and claims of their fatherlands with their lives.

But Nietzsche looks far beyond the horizon of military and national seriousness; by studying his own becoming as an example, he discovers the gravity of the struggle for self-birth that the individual has to wage with himself and his fate. With the ultimate acuteness, Nietzsche lifts into the light a circumstance that had rarely ever been independently examined previously: namely, that the task of leading life out of its raw material likeness and making into a work *sui generis* can take on the quality of a life-and-death struggle. That is why Nietzsche is, in the final analysis, more a psychagogue than a psychologist, even if his psychological genius seems to have been posted at the entrance to the twentieth century—the true psychological century—as a monumental guardian statue; even Sigmund Freud, the herald of psychologization, had cause during his lifetime to deny that he had reached his territory through the gate of Nietzsche.

As a psychagogue of modernity, Nietzsche is the leader in the lovely temptation to create great life-forms out of the material of talent and character. It would seem that Nietzsche, in so doing, brought forth into the world more than merely a rationalization of his own difficulties in life. With his pedagogical-psychagogic impulses, he reacted to the secular changes in the educational conditions of the modern world. From a sociopsychological perspective one could define modernity as the impossibility of educating individuals to completion: there are only diplomas; there is no longer maturity. That is why parents and teachers are now systematically "incapable of coping with" their offspring and pupils—the reason being that the finished world itself, from which the pedagogical labor of conformity was to take its cues, has in turn crumbled as a result of dynamization. Education as a way of aligning the world and young people is running on empty—and whoever wanted to accept its factual results genuinely as final results would surely be one of those last people on whom Nietzsche's inciting contempt was ignited. What appears in Nietzsche as an aesthetic *Weltanschauung* is in truth a potent psychagogic program for a world time of postclassical strategies for human elevation. It responds to the necessity that modern individuals find themselves under, namely, to transcend the horizon of their prior education. In this context, Nietzsche's infamous words about the *Übermensch* mean nothing other than a challenge to create the autoplastically self-educating Self as a work of art out of the semifinished product that mothers and teachers send out into the world. The logical consequence of this program is the transition from the precedence of self-understanding to that of self-realization.

Anyone who thinks that this view seems too lofty should consider that one hundred years after Nietzsche even unions are preaching the necessity of lifelong learning and training. If one strips the notion of the *Übermensch* of the element of genius and religiosity, one arrives automatically at the concept of the learning

society. However, gone from that society would be the specifically Nietzschean goad, namely the incitement to godly individualization. Any such thing could be reactivated only through a return to radical concepts of elitism that could not be neutralized even by a deregulated *Übermenschen* market or art market. Nothing of the kind is evident today anywhere, provided one perceives the art tyrants and the autogenous gods of the contemporary global celebrity system for the fools that they are rather than the incarnations they wish to be.

If we presupposed this, Nietzsche, the helpless master of the dangerous idea of cultivating humans into something higher, can be regarded as a domesticated writer; at least he himself laid claim to the title *Hanswurst* (buffoon) for himself at one of the most exposed places in his work. Under this premise—and *only* under this premise—can one discern in the theorem of the *Übermensch* an idea of world-moving usefulness and urgency. It points out that contemporary culture must invent a system of education and self-education that would be capable of producing individuals fit for a globalized world in sufficient numbers. Without such a revolution of self-education and self-cultivation, humanity today has no chance of solving its impending problems. The important thing would be to bring the self-education emergency and the ecological emergency into convergence. As for Nietzsche, in a crucial passage he described this work as the revaluation of all values. The culturally revolutionary relevance of this formula is unexhausted, even if its interpretations to date—including Nietzsche's own—have remained unsatisfactory. The classical kynical motif of "reminting the coin" had been picked up by Nietzsche to set an anti-Christian turnaround in motion; it was, as we know, Nietzsche's reformist dream to trigger a counterrevolution of health against the *morbus metaphysicus* that had cast its spell over the Western world since the days of Socrates and Paul with its inhibitions. Anyone who wants to "remint the coin" must rewrite

the texts, the Platonic ones no less than those of the New Testament. Nietzsche's most important effect likely emanates from his talent of imbuing sacred texts, in serious parodies, with unexpectedly contrary meanings. He turned old texts into new tunes, and wrote new texts for old tunes. His parodistic genius exploded all traditional genres of discoursing in elevated and lowly tones. As a buffo founder of religion, he preached the Sermon on the Mount anew and rewrote the Tablets of Sinai; as anti-Plato he laid out earthly ladders of power and vigor for the soul seeking to rise to something higher. One may question whether his rewriting of the texts and redirecting of forces should enjoy universal success. But what remains unfinished and more relevant than ever is the habit of Nietzsche's attempts at reformulating the spirit of the moral laws in keeping with the contemporary age. Perhaps one can learn from Nietzsche's parodistic art something for the task of writing anew the tablets on which will be inscribed the rules for the survival of the industrious animal *homo sapiens*. It could turn out that revaluing the values and remaining loyal to the earth are tasks that amount to the same thing.

HUSSERL

To the tricky questions of how much certainty humans need to find their bearings in thinking, some among the founders of modern philosophizing—above all, Descartes, Fichte, and Husserl—responded with the sonorous thesis that nothing less than absolute certainty is enough. With this claim, the project of philosophy as rigorous science—repeatedly picked up anew by the process of modernity—launched itself. It is in this very claim that the idea of philosophy as the ur-exercise of rigor has its final support. As a science prior to and above the sciences, rigorous authoritative thought seeks to demonstrate that the totality of material phenomena is constructed out of achievements of consciousness.

If the question posited at the outset is tricky, it is so because it goes hand in hand with the insinuation that the striving for absolute assurance is encumbered with an element of neediness, indeed, of existential misery. Searching for absolute certainty

would thus mean admitting to calamitous uncertainty. That the serenity of achieved certainty is rooted in groundless instability: ever since the modern metaphilosophical questionings of motives, the philosophical quest for the peace of the thinking soul has also had to learn to live with this suspicion. Here it becomes clear how, through the project of science, philosophy's motif of showing intelligence the path of salvation, which has been powerfully effective since Greek antiquity, asserts its rights also on the territory of the modern world. In the Western Titanomachy between disquiet and quiet, the partisans of absolute certainty take the side of sacred immobility, as though they wanted to profess along with the Church Fathers: our heart is restless until it finds rest in self-evidence. The minds of modernity part company over the question of whether this self-evidence is genuinely attainable, and whether, once attained, it is suited to healing the ontological psychosis of the restless animal.

Among the philosophizing world doctors of the twentieth century, the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, holds a special place. As the teacher of thinking self-perception, he removed himself and his students into a theoretical sanatorium where no other measures were on the agenda other than exercises of clarification in the purest air of detailed descriptions. On Husserl's Magic Mountain, the students learned—first and last—the sacrifice-demanding art of being pure patients; in the face of what had seemed long since familiar and known, they indulged in the beautiful sufferings of phenomenological patience. Insight into the omniactivity of subjectivity is held out as a potential reward for patience. Anyone who has spent any time in that peculiar sanatorium of evidences knows something about the oppressiveness of exactitude, an oppressiveness of which the world's children, living as they do with heedless anxiety in the practical lowlands, could not even dream. There is a demonicness of explicitness to which only those have access who devote themselves to the

exercitationes spirituales of descriptions artfully carried out and written down.

He who enters into the time of the pure exercise of descriptions is removed, as it were, from the life time that simultaneously runs its course, and the objects of the phenomenological mediation assemble on the desk of the thinker into sublime still lifes. They are no longer naively encountered objects from the so-called real world, but figures in the absolute film of intentionality. For the duration of his exercise, the describer steps out of the torrential time of life lived heading toward death, and entrusts himself to the present of absolute consciousness. Drawing on the latter's power of vision, the phenomenologist undertakes the task—as strange as it is seductive—of elevating what has been seen a thousand times and is long known once again into a topic, as though the goal is to catch it by surprise as it emerges out of the creative consciousness at the moment it is first beheld. Like hardly another thinker before him, Husserl brought the unity of thinking and writing into a gestural synthesis. To him, the desk, if we assume a true philosopher has sat down at it, is the window onto the world of essences; here, beholding and writing prove to be convergent activities. The written recording of the phenomenological observation reveals as its calligraphic core the tireless exercise of the writing hand. Philosophy, practiced as an act of descriptive reason, is thus unmasked as fundamentally an "office-osophy" [*Bürosophie*]; it enacts itself as the activity of an intellect that has taken a holiday from the natural attitude. The chair of the philosopher, who has immersed himself in arid ecstasy in his descriptions, is the bearer of a seated observer; out of the pen of the thinker flows the ink of the original evidence: his writings capture the living intuitions on the paper like congealed light. His own desk is the place where the contemplator deigns to let the world be present in its entirety. As the preferred setting for thematizing everything that appears, the philosopher's desk turns into a transcendental belvedere. Only at

this desk could there take place the process of undoing the erroneous judgments of precipitous reason, which tends to get lost in momentous self-deception both in daily life and in science. In this process, phenomenology rendered its verdict against the essential blindness of vulgar relativism and psychologism, as well as against the blindness to the subjectivity of scientistic objectivism. In the final analysis, the desk of the phenomenologist is an altar at which the thinker officiates as a pure functionary of the Absolute; here the philosopher performs his service as the vicar of a lucid God.

Yet the withdrawal of the phenomenologist to the desk of universal self-reflection was not able to alter the course of the modern world as a whole. As though moved by a higher power, the modern scientific-technological evolution strives—as its major tendency—toward ever more encompassing states of naturalism and relativism. The phenomenological guardians of Being, who exercised themselves as the eyes of God in a transcendental contemplation of the world, found themselves increasingly marginalized and passed over by a process of investigation that is leading modern civilization toward an integral technological naturalism. Already the contemporaneous psychologies of the unconscious undermined the project of an integral science of the actions of world-constituting consciousness; and what is more: out of the developments of cybernetic technology and the globalized conditions of capital there emerged a new world of facts that are subject to a mode of Being that is not related to consciousness. More and more, the experiential realm of modernity seems pervaded by technological objects that offer consciousness only a surface: such surfaces of keys and symbols, beneath which highly complex apparatuses confront their users, can hardly still be grasped as phenomena in the specific meaning of the world, since it is characteristic of them that within them, Being turns its back on Manifestation. What is essential technologically no longer appears to consciousness as phenomena. In the face of the technological environment,

phenomenology seems like the philosophical testament of the pretechnological world. Even for Husserl's most independent student, Martin Heidegger, who would become unfaithful to his master in so many ways, technology remained a metaphysically suspect entity; he perceived in it a formation of phenomenological injustice and believed that he could recognize it as an ontological error. The thought of Heidegger and Husserl reveals that a philosophy of technology cannot succeed on the basis of a theory that proceeds—following "old Western" conventions—from the primacy of the correspondence between Thinking and Being. To be sure, even modern-day systems theory—which has become the basic theory, as it were, of the technological world—still attests indirectly to the epochal suggestive power of the phenomenological perspective, a theory in which the transcendental subject, reformatted into the figure of the observed observer, stubbornly recurs. In fact, does the current penchant for systems-theoretical thinking not betray a continuation of Husserlian motifs in a way that is appropriate to technology? In its original gestalt, Husserl's work—which ends, not by accident, with a lonely call for a heroism of reason that must be newly awakened—keeps alive the memory of the greatness and limitation of the European culture of rationality.

WITTGENSTEIN

Barely half a century after the death of the philosopher, the name Ludwig Wittgenstein—like that of Martin Heidegger—is part of the intellectual mythos of the twentieth century. Even if Vico's distinction between civil and monastic philosophy seemed to have become obsolete ever since the French Revolution, one is inclined to reactivate this distinction for Wittgenstein's sake. How else could one interpret the emergence of the phenomenon that was Wittgenstein in the midst of an age of political philosophies and warring illusions than as the renewed eruption of thinking in the mode of eremitic aloofness from the world? Part of the still luminescent enchantment of Wittgenstein's work and the standoffish nimbus of his life is the unexpected return of the monastic element in the moral center of bourgeois culture. More so than virtually anyone else, he attests to the moral secession of an intellectual elite from the totality of mediocre conditions.

The human being as something to be transcended: that conviction was present in the elect of the educated class in Vienna before the Great War not only in its Nietzschean guise and as a philosophy of life; it asserted itself also in the forms of a bourgeois cult of the saint, at the center of which stood the figure of the artistic and philosophic genius. It was the responsibility of that figure to offer salvation from ambiguities and mediocrity; it was his task to show an implacably demanding youth the path from the depths of shameful commonness to the lofty heights of transfigurative callings. Grandeur became a duty for genius, self-transcendence the minimum condition of existence. For the young Wittgenstein this meant: the human being is a rope that is strung between the animal and the logician.

The story of Wittgenstein's life and thought is the passion of an intellect that sought to explain its place in the world and at its boundaries. What the contemporary world of the philosopher perceived as his rigid and demanding aura was the high tension of a man who required constant concentration on his ordering principles so as not to lose his mind. As one dwelling on the borderline of Being, the philosopher is never concerned with anything less than the block of the world as a whole, even when he is merely pondering the correct use of a word in a sentence. He feels as though the world along with all its order could get lost in the space between two sentences. And so, thinking becomes for him a navigating between islands of formal clarity that lie scattered in the vastness of unclarity. In fact, Wittgenstein is a thinker who left behind a work of individual sentences. It was his unprecedented need for precision that would make him into a martyr of incoherence. He himself was painfully aware that he was suffering from a kind of Lord Chandos neurosis—a disorder of the ability to assert coherences of the world through words, and to believe in these claimed coherences. Throughout his life, Wittgenstein failed to meet the challenge of composing a real "text" in the sense

of continuous speech. He felt, more keenly than any other thinker before him, the difficulties of conjunctions or clausal linkages, and no problem preoccupied him more profoundly all his life than the impossibility of moving from the description of facts to ethical precepts. His notes are the monument of an overly brilliant hesitation to create the world in a cohesive text. In their radical modernity, his writings attest to the disintegration of the analogy between the round cosmos and fluid prose. But precisely because Wittgenstein was no longer capable of being a proposition-happy philosopher of systems and totality in the traditional style, he was virtually predestined to lift the patchwork of local life games and their rules into the light. There was a good reason why his theory of language games became one of the most potent arguments of modern and postmodern pluralism.

Looking back today over the waves of Wittgenstein's reception, one can say at least this much about the historical importance of this peculiar Viennese character who ended up in the British world of scholars: he inoculated the Anglo-American world with the madness of ontological difference by exhorting the precritical empiricist to wonder, not at how the world is, but that it is. At the same time, he infected continental philosophy with a new idea of precise style, which brought forth flourishing outgrowths in the milieu of the analytical school. It would appear that both parties are by now in the process of getting over the phase of the initial immune responses. Ever since Alan Janik and Steven Toulmin's classic study *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, the stage seems set for a healthy engagement with the stimuli of the magical hermit. Who could still invoke Wittgenstein only to elect him the patron saint of odd mind games? Who could still denounce him as the positivistic destroyer of the Western culture of reflection? After the waning of the reactive distortions, what emerges is the profile of a thinker who will undoubtedly be counted among the godparents of the intelligence of the future. Even in its logical severities and human

one-sidedness, Wittgenstein's intensity holds gifts of incalculable import for posterity. It attests for all those who awaken to thinking after him that ethical questions have become more difficult. Should it ever be possible to write a critique of martyrological or witness-bearing reason—and thus a valid ethics—a decisive chapter would have to be devoted to the man Wittgenstein. He is among those flayed alive, who know more than others what decency under stress means. Among his work, what was written and what was kept quiet, one must count the admirable exertion to have endured himself and his own "wonderful" life.

SARTRE

A little more than three decades after his death (on April 15, 1980), Sartre already appears like a monumental figure in the history of modern literature and philosophy. He, the man of words and books, has joined his ancestors, the classics, the immortals, the established authors. Only death, so it would seem, was able to keep him from rejuvenating himself; only the status as a classic deprived him of the possibility of continuing to contradict himself. Like few others, he was in love with the freedom to displease himself. His life gesture—dangerous for a philosopher, exhilarating for himself and his readers—was the constant surge, the tearing oneself away from what one has become; as a writer he always penned only the new page. He became a genius of analytical biography—of others and his own—because he found in every consciousness the point at which human beings are too proud to admit to a past. He ceaselessly pondered the release from the

gravity of history; he felt, with an acuity that elevated him into a kind of world conscience, that it dishonors a human being to be tired, imprisoned, and identical with his own self. His philosophy is a struggle against obscenity, against comfortable bourgeois alienation; he campaigns against the human being glued into reality, against the finished human being. The issue is not to be a thing: *on a raison de se révolter*; he who rebels is right. Explicable only via his freedom, the human is the being without apology.

In a synoptic retrospective, Sartre appears today for now as the last hero in a series of mighty European philosophers of freedom. Ever since the young Fichte seized the standard of subjectivity and carried it with manic vigor against what he believed to be his perfectly sinful age, the chain of thinkers who interpreted the nature of human beings as freedom has not been interrupted. Like his predecessors, Sartre understood the human being in the hearth of his consciousness as that restless absurd being that, against a backdrop of rising self-clarification, plunges ever more deeply into its absurdity. To him, being human meant taking on oneself as an active nothing, as a living fathomlessness. That subjectivity means abyssality—this frightened Sartre less than it did most of his precursors in this discovery. Even the resolute Fichte in the end sought to overcome his demonstration of abysmal subjectivity by placing his own spontaneity into the expressive life of a divinity that did everything; Friedrich Schlegel, the master ironist among the Romantic subjectivists, converted to Catholicism, which became from the early nineteenth century on a refuge for the newly groundless; the Catholic Church certainly liked to play the womb for the grown-up unborns who sought to escape the coldness of the modern outside world. The vanguard among the anonymous absurd who made up the core of modernity tried it with art applied to life; they gave themselves stability in attitudes and in a life lived in accordance with fashionable styles. But a great majority of those rendered sickly by groundlessness looked

for ways to reembed themselves into the communal life of the state, society, and class. The greatest among them was no less a thinker than the philosopher Hegel, who during his life found salvation by celebrating masses for the Prussian state as an ethical organism; he was emulated by countless admirers of the repaired totalities; no small number of them lost their *mal du siècle* in service to the state and in service to revolution; so many holisms, so many altars; others fled to the front lines of hot and cold wars. It goes without saying that the obsession with connections must conjure forth a wealth of fundamentalisms. For two hundred years, modernity has been a stage on which a single problem has been manifested in the most diverse plays; they could all be called: How the free groundless found their way back into stable relationships.

As for Sartre, he remained throughout his life faithful to his way of living the groundless freedom. To him, the nothingness of subjectivity was not a downward-plunging abyss, but a spring bubbling upward, an excess of the power of negation against everything that was encompassing. In contrast to many thinkers of subjectivity, Sartre felt comfortable in his abyssality; leaning on anything was for him more a compulsory exercise than freestyle. What he called *engagement* was the continuation of *dégagement* by other means; he had no doubt that disconnecting took precedence over new bonds. He had mastered the art of spontaneously desiring nearly everything he had to do; in this way he preempted compulsion wherever possible. *Glissez, mortels, n'appuyez pas!*, his grandmother's saying, repeatedly cited by him in prominent places in his work, captured his motto for life: "Glide, mortals, do not lean!" When Sartre tried to glide with Hegel and Marx on his back, he too, the man of unconditional elegance, began to lean. All his efforts to become a Marxist were an arduous theoretical comedy to apologize for his genius and for his awareness of being incomparable. Almost to the end, Sartre—who also wanted to be his own therapist—remained incurably productive.

In our time there exist no more profound writer's words than his late profession: "I've given up the office but not the frock: I still write. What else can I do?" He was perhaps the most diligent, active philosophical author of the twentieth century. He has repaid his putative debts to less favored humanity with high interest.

FOUCAULT

The entire history of Western philosophy is nothing but a long series of footnotes to Plato: were it necessary to refute this well-known jest of the British late-idealist Whitehead, it would suffice to point to exceptions and contrary currents. It would be more convincing if one could invoke an alternative way of thought, one that had evaded the Platonic or—more generally speaking—the old-European project of metaphysical sciences of essences in its entire habit and deportment. In fact, since the establishment of middle-class society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] in the later eighteenth century, such a revolution in the mode of thinking announced itself in various waves. With the turn of the Young Hegelians to a *Realphilosophie* [material philosophy] from the bottom up—whether as an anthropology of labor, a materialist doctrine of instincts, or existentialism—the demand for a radically altered mode of philosophizing stood on the agenda of an

intelligentsia that was determined to provide the process of modernity with appropriate tools of thought. Over the course of the twentieth century, this thinking "from below" would become radicalized into a thinking of the outside. But only after Nietzsche's inversion of Platonism and Heidegger's reorientation of philosophical reflection on the basis of "a different beginning" was it possible to recognize with greater certainty what a thinking whose generative pole had effectively stepped outside of the zone of metaphysical theories of essences would be all about. It would have to be a thinking that had freed itself vigorously enough from the Eleatic temptations and would know how to hand itself over to the adventure of a fully temporalized and agitated existence, without seeking support in the classical fictions of a transcendent subject or an absolute object.

The postmetaphysical challenge provoked a number of characteristic responses in the twentieth century, some of which not only gave rise to incisive projects, but also achieved public resonance and effects within academia. Here one should mention above all relativistic neopragmatism, the post-Marxist theory of communicative action, the body-philosophy of the neophenomenological school, deconstructionist textual criticism, sociological systems theory, and the neokynical aesthetic of the everyday. Only when set against the backdrop of such broadly related intellectual practices does the specific difference of Foucaultean thinking stand out in its magnificent willfulness and radicality. In this thinking it now becomes fully evident what it means for the "human being" to draw the consequences from the death of God. In Foucault, so it would seem, the art of not writing footnotes to Plato has developed for the first time into an alternative classicism, and this even though he introduced into the business of philosophical examinations—through his blazing intellect—a high degree of manic potential, which, at other times, would surely have become effective as the ideal dowry for the thinking of the One. In this,

the phenomenon of Foucault resembles that of Nietzsche, in whom quasi-Platonic passions led in an analogous way to anti-Platonic spiritual exercises. Foucaultean thinking, which had so resolutely turned its back on all illusions of the secure embeddedness of the particular within the unity of meaning, pointed with pride to the formulations by which, during its formative phase, it had been led to the conviction that it was moving at the very pinnacle of thought: it dated itself confessionally to a time when Nietzsche, Blanchot, and Bataille had already defined an epoch. These authors, these works, these sallies are for Foucault the guarantors of a contemporary sensibility that had opened itself equally to the dizziness of the dissolution of boundaries and to the acuity of analysis. They are the thinkers who inoculate their readers with madness and put them in contact with the uncanny. But it was not only the poetic dissolution of metaphysics in surrealism that would set the tone in the initiation of the young philosophers; for Foucault, the future new historian, the archaeologist, the transformation of the idealistic sciences of essences into structuralism would also become decisive—a process that ensured French thought for a relatively brief but highly successful period the primacy in the contemporary history of the human sciences and their philosophy.

Only in this unrepeatable constellation, which marked a crucial phase in the postmetaphysical transformation of philosophical thinking, could there occur what would later be called the Foucault event. Where Nietzsche had proclaimed that Dionysus had become a philosopher, Foucault asserted the thesis: Dionysus had become an archivist. In the basement files of psychiatric institutions, asylums, clinics, and later also prisons, a young scholar undertook the enormous task of sifting through the material, driven by the willingness to perceive also in the gray of the administrative language of ages past the lightning of the events, which the literary ontology of late Surrealism had dealt with only with

a view to the way in which language existed in the autonomous poem. These researches of the Dionysian archeologist gave birth to the very synthesis of flamboyance and severity, of monumental learnedness and flagrant laughter, which has not ceased to irritate the academic milieu and inspire kindred intelligences. Foucault's subversion of philosophical knowledge is betrayed not least in his turning away from the problem games of official philosophy and in his resolute embrace of "material" works; once could almost mistake the early Foucault for a psychologist and a literary critic, and the middle and late Foucault by a hair for a social historian and a sexologist.

And yet, even though Foucault buried himself in the archives of the humanities and of disciplinary practices, he remains in the most eminent sense a philosopher, and every page of his writings refutes the possibility of confusion with the discourse of the individual disciplines. Still, within his *oeuvre* there is hardly a text that could be read—the way the guild would—as a contribution to the so-called foundational problems of philosophy, let alone as an exegesis of the classics. Nevertheless, Foucault kept the universe of orthodox metaphysical thinking in view with professional cool; more so, perhaps, than anyone else, he knew what had to be avoided, overcome, replaced, if the undertaking of a thinking beyond the rigged games of substance, subject, and object was to succeed. "The world as sphere, I as compass, God as center—that is the threefold blockage of event-thinking." With this calm aside, he set the new thinking, which for him articulated itself initially and especially in the minute examination of regional and datable regimes of discourse and power, worlds apart from the metaphysical classicism along with its semimodern adjustments in the phenomenological movement and in Freudian-Marxian social philosophies.

Maliciously and temperamentally he took note that certain philosophers lamented him as the lost son of transcendental

philosophy, while some historians looked askance at his works as wild and excessively glamorous historical fictions. Representatives of both disciplines found it difficult to situate a thinker who did not seem interested in accumulating a capital of lasting truths, but who stepped onto the stage as someone who intended to write a history of lightning bolts. Had Foucault entertained ontological intentions, he could have indeed claimed that all truthful Being is of the nature of lightning. The meaning of Being is not existence and the timeless preservation of essence, but event, the opening up of the horizon, and the spawning of temporary orders. But while the German adepts of Nietzsche and Heidegger mostly allow the notion of Event (*Ereignis*) to become indistinct within a cultic contemplation, Foucault accomplished the breakthrough to a foundational research oriented toward Event philosophy, for which he proposed the subtly ironic title archeology. Nobody understood its principle and intent better than Gilles Deleuze, who concisely captured his own, closely related intention with the felicitous formula about the "universal history of the contingent."

Foucault's philosopherdom would not have been complete, however, if there had not existed alongside the epistemologist and archeologist also the politician and ethicist Foucault, who stepped up to the challenge of rethinking the core of all philosophy, the theory of freedom: no longer in the style of a philosophical theology of liberation—also known as alienation theory, but as a doctrine of the Event that liberates the individual and in which he moulds and risks himself. What he remarked in a eulogy for his friend, the Christian Kantian Maurice Clavel, can also be read as a clear-sighted and candid characterization of his own undertaking: "He stood at the heart of what was probably most important in our epoch. I want to say: a very comprehensive and very profound change in the consciousness that the Occident has slowly formed about history and time.

Everything that organized this consciousness, everything that gave it continuity, everything that promised its consummation, is tearing apart. Certain people would like to patch it up again. But he told us that one must live the time differently, even today. Especially today."[1]

NOTES

Foreword to the English Translation

1. William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, act 2, scene 2, lines 2–5.
2. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (West Valley City, UT: Editorium, 2007), 2.
3. Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 40 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
4. Marguerite Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, translated by Richard Seaver (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 38.

Preface

1. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, eds., *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 205, no. 235.

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, edited by Bernard Williams, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, poems translated by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 200.
2. Author's Note: The suspicion that Nietzsche—following upon Kant, Marx, and Feuerbach—helped to kindle, namely, that the history of European metaphysics can be read also as the success story of a profound untruth or semitruth, was spelled out in the twentieth century in a spectrum of penetrating accusations. Heidegger believed that he could discern in the history of European metaphysics and technology the consummation of a thoroughly malign fate of *Seinsvergessenheit* (oblivion of Being); Adorno saw in it the triumph of a compulsive, latently paranoid lack of identity; Hermann Schmitz diagnosed already in the emergence of philosophy its leading role in the development of a power-oriented type of reason that was based on false abstractions, misleading dualism, and a deep misunderstanding of nature and the body, feeling, and subjectivity; the feminist critique denounced the majority of philosophers as agents of an androcentric fabrication of illusion supported by power; in Otto Rank, Peter Sloterdijk, and others, one can find approaches to a critique of classical philosophy as the medium of an oblivion of birth, which manifests itself in heroic, technological, and idealistic-spontaneistic compensations. All these interpretations have in common that they incorporate European philosophy into a broad critique of destructive forms of rationalism.
3. Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, text and translation with an introduction by Sears Reynolds Jayne (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1944), 35.
4. See Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, translated by Liadain Sherrard with the assistance of Philip Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993).
5. Adolf von Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 63ff. and 112ff.

6. See Ioan P. Culianu, *Out of This World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein*, foreword by Lawrence E. Sullivan (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), chap. 10, "Interplanetary Tours: *The Platonic Space Shuttle, from Plotinus to Marsilio Ficino*."
7. On this, see Peter Sloterdijk, *Im selben Boot: Versuch über die Hyperpolitik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), chap. 2, pp. 25–49, "Staats-Athletik: Vom Geist der Megalopathie."
8. See Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, translated from the 2nd German edition by Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).
9. See Arnold Gehlen, *Moral und Hypermoral: Eine pluralistische Ethik* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1973), 79ff.
10. See Paul Rabbow, *Paidagogia: Die Grundlegung der abendländischen Erziehungskunst in der Sokratik*, edited by Ernst Pfeiffer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1960); Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited with an introduction by Arnold Davidson, translated by Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).
11. Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*, translated by Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy (New York: Routledge, 1995).

Marx

1. See Günter Schulte, *Kennen Sie Marx? Kritik der proletarischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1992).

Foucault

1. Michel Foucault, "Vivre autrement le temps," in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 755 (April 30–May 5, 1979): 88, quoted from *Dits et écrits*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 790.

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